

Position Paper on Funding and the Integration of Social Innovation in the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034

A joint position of National Competence Centres for Social Innovation and ecosystem actors across Europe

This position paper draws on input collected from actors active in 14 European countries (Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain), covering perspectives from National Competence Centre for Social Innovation, EaSI National Contact Points, public authorities, managing authorities/intermediate bodies, NGOs, research institutions, networks, platforms, and service providers, representing several vantage points across the European ecosystem of social innovation.

The organisations contributing to this paper welcome the European Commission’s ambition to build a more strategic, performance-oriented and future-focused Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028–2034. While the proposed architecture places a strong emphasis on competitiveness, resilience, skills, cohesion, and, very briefly, on social investment, it is crucial to acknowledge that delivering on these priorities will require not only funding, but also more effective ways to design, test and scale solutions to complex societal challenges. In this context, social innovation (SI) should move beyond being treated as a marginal theme, as it has the potential to become a practical cross-cutting approach to implementation.

Although it is stated in the MFF proposal that Europe faces overlapping green, digital, demographic and social transitions, within the current package, social innovation appears explicitly only in a very limited way, notably in the [Factsheet on „Social and Skills”](#) where the EU Facility refers to support microfinance, social enterprise finance, social economy and social infrastructure. This is an important signal, but it is too narrow to match the broader role that social innovation can play in delivering EU objectives. The much larger operational pillars of the package, notably the [National and Regional Partnership Plans \(NRPP\)](#), the [European Social Fund](#) delivered through those plans, [Horizon Europe](#), and the wider [competitiveness framework](#) and the [Competitiveness Fund](#), already pursue objectives to which social innovation is directly relevant, including quality employment, skills, social inclusion, territorial cohesion, resilience, the clean and digital transitions, and improved access to finance for innovation. However, in these parts of the package, social innovation is not yet framed clearly as a transversal implementation approach, nor is it given a sufficiently visible pathway for support, experimentation, scaling and uptake. This creates a structural imbalance because while the proposal recognises many of the goals that social innovation helps achieve, it does not yet recognise with equal clarity the methods, actors and support systems needed to achieve them.

As concluded from the analyses in the Annex, social innovation is already used across Europe by public authorities, civil society, social economy actors and support organisations to address needs that conventional instruments and standard delivery models do not adequately resolve, even though this is not always reflected in the national policy framework as such, which makes the case even stronger on the stringent importance to address this imbalance between practice and policy in the next MFF package.

Recommendations

1. Recognise social innovation as a transversal delivery approach in the next MFF

The Commission's proposal already recognises many of the objectives that social innovation serves: social rights, equal opportunities, poverty reduction, quality jobs, skills, territorial cohesion, resilience and fair transitions. What is still missing is a clearer recognition of social innovation as a method for delivering those objectives more effectively. Because the new budget is built around NRPPs, social innovation should be recognised explicitly in the next MFF, its guidance and implementing texts as a transversal delivery approach relevant to employment, inclusion, education, health, housing, territorial development, democratic participation, resilience and the green transition. This recognition should also be reflected in programming guidance, monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

2. Ensure explicit and visible support for funding social innovation in the NRPPs and the EU Facility

The NRPP architecture is one of the strongest opportunities in the package to align European priorities with territorial needs, but its effectiveness will depend on whether the plans will create clear space for innovation in implementation, and not only aggregate existing administrative measures. NRPP guidance and implementing texts should therefore explicitly enable national and regional key actors, including National Competence Centres for Social Innovation, civil society organisations, social economy actors, research bodies and ecosystem intermediaries, to participate in the design, delivery, monitoring and scaling of solutions and local programs under the NRPP. This would be consistent with the collaborative logic of the NRPPs themselves and with the role these actors already play in building local capacity and identifying solutions through social innovation. In parallel, the EU Facility for Union-level actions should provide a clearer and stronger framework for social innovation with European added value, including cross-border learning, transfer, scaling, technical support and inter-regional cooperation, rather than leaving social innovation as a narrow or isolated reference within a much wider instrument. Moreover, a clearly identifiable financial envelope should be allocated to transnational cooperation on social innovation, as part of the EU Facility

3. Preserve and strengthen dedicated support through the European Social Fund and related social investment instruments

The proposed minimum of 14% of NRPP expenditure for social spending is welcome, but it is not enough on its own to secure support for social innovation. Without an explicit pathway, there is a real risk that the social target will be absorbed mainly by short-term or compensatory spending, rather than by preventive, systemic and scalable solutions that address root causes and improve long-term delivery. The next MFF should preserve a clearly identifiable ESF space for social innovation, including capacity-building and ecosystem support. If a quantified ask is to be included, the most defensible option is to encourage Member States to move towards allocating at least 2%-2.5% of ESF+ resources within the NRPP architecture to social innovation-related actions. This is grounded in the current implementation of [the ESF+ Programmes \(2021-2027\)](#), where dedicated social innovation priorities already account for 1.65% of total ESF+ resources, and 15 Member States are already above that average. In practice, this support should cover experimentation, scaling, transfer, ecosystem infrastructure, impact measurement and public-interest intermediaries.

4. Integrate social innovation more deliberately into competitiveness, research and business support

The proposal's strongest priority is clearly competitiveness, industrial deployment and research. That is understandable. But the proposed architecture also reveals one of the clearest gaps in the current package: social innovation is still treated primarily as a social-policy concern, even though many of the examples provided through the consultation in the Annex show that it also contributes to competitiveness, employability, circularity, digital solutions, green transition and new forms of value creation. [The Competitiveness Fund proposal](#) explicitly allows special support for access to finance for SMEs and small mid-caps, "including micro-finance" and "support to social enterprises", and the explanatory logic of the proposal states that EU funding is justified where social returns outweigh private returns. The next MFF should therefore recognise socially innovative businesses, social

enterprises and other impact-driven models more clearly within competitiveness instruments, including through access to finance, scale-up support, market uptake and deployment. At the same time, the research and innovation architecture, especially Horizon Europe’s support across the project journey, should more explicitly value social innovation as part of Europe’s broader innovation capacity, particularly in areas linked to the clean transition, inclusion and quality jobs.

5. Strengthen ecosystem infrastructure, competence centres, diversified instruments and impact measurement

The consultation behind this paper repeatedly shows that effective social innovation depends not only on projects, but on the wider infrastructure that enables them, such as competence centres, support organisations, mentoring, communities of practice, ecosystem mapping, partnership-building, impact measurement and technical support. This is one of the strongest lessons of the current programming period related to social innovation, and the next MFF should recognise these functions as part of the implementation architecture and support them accordingly. This should include multiannual technical assistance, structured support for National Competence Centres and other public-interest intermediaries, shared frameworks for impact measurement and learning, and funding pathways that go beyond standard grants to cover experimentation, transfer and scale-up. Experience under the current ESF+ Social Innovation+ framework already shows the added value of such support at both the EU and national level, and the proposals for National Strategies point in the same direction. For example, Portugal’s 2030 Agenda for Impact is the result of work led by the National Competence Centre for Social Innovation; Germany’s strategy aims to reduce disadvantages and expand needs-based support; and the Romanian strategy developed through national-scale consultations prioritises skills, impact measurement, visibility, flexible finance, and ecosystem connectivity, while explicitly calling for continued ESF+ backing and for instruments such as local matchfunding. The next MFF should therefore strengthen support for social innovation ecosystems through dedicated technical assistance and structured support for competence centres and intermediaries still developing under the current MFF.

Taken together, these recommendations call for a more coherent and ambitious recognition of social innovation within the existing architecture of the next MFF proposed by the Commission. We therefore call on the European Commission, Member States, regions and MFF negotiators to ensure that social innovation is recognised as a practical capability for delivering the Union’s social, territorial and competitiveness objectives more effectively.

This position paper draws on input collected from 23 key actors active in 14 countries: Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain.

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Annex

The importance of social innovation for the next MFF

This position paper draws on input collected from 23 key actors active in 14 countries (Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain), covering perspectives from National Competence Centres for Social Innovation, EaSI National Contact Points, public authorities, managing authorities/intermediate bodies, NGOs, research institutions, networks, platforms, service providers and ecosystem intermediaries, representing several vantage points across the ecosystem. The consultation brings together perspectives from actors operating at different scales of ecosystems of social innovators, ranging from clusters of a couple of hundred organisations to national-level coverage ecosystems, networks of more than 1.000 actors and unique platforms with a beneficiary reach of over 600.000 people. The consultation represents a qualitative cross-country input.

As defined in [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1057](#), social innovation is “social both as to its ends and its means”. It is therefore not limited to solving a social problem, and it also concerns how solutions “are designed, delivered and scaled, namely through new products, services, practices or models that meet social needs while creating new relationships and forms of collaboration between public authorities, civil society and private actors”. This is exactly why social innovation should be integrated more clearly in the next MFF. [The Commission’s package proposal](#) presents the future budget as a tool to invest in people, Member States and regions through simpler and more tailored NRPPs, with the explicit aim of maximising the impact of every euro and advancing the European Pillar of Social Rights through quality employment, skills, social inclusion, equal opportunities and stronger social safety nets. Yet the consultation behind this paper shows that these objectives will not be achieved by funding alone, especially in the context of overlapping green, digital, demographic and social transitions.

Across the countries consulted, social innovation is repeatedly described as a practical response to delivery gaps in areas such as labour market exclusion, poverty, access to services and territorial disparities, precisely because it allows institutions and communities to test new approaches, adapt them to local realities, involve citizens and stakeholders in the design of solutions, and build cooperation across sectors. This broader logic is also reflected in a [World Economic Forum](#) tested-approach on poverty reduction, which demonstrates that durable progress depends not only on resources, but on smarter and more adaptable models that involve people in the design response, and make use of social innovation that is supported by the right systems for scaling. The same conclusion emerges from the evidence gathered for this paper: what makes social innovation effective is not only the individual project, but the wider enabling conditions around it, including flexible funding, impact measurement, ecosystem support and pathways to continuity and scale. For these reasons, social innovation should be recognised in the next MFF not as a niche or marginal theme, but as a transversal implementation approach that can help the NRPPs and related EU instruments translate broad policy objectives into effective, scalable results within country-adapted methods.

Social innovation improves delivery where standard systems and market responses do not perform well enough

Across the responses, social innovation is presented as a practical response to persistent delivery gaps in areas where public systems are often too fragmented, too rigid or too under-capacitated to respond effectively. This applies to long-term unemployment, homelessness, palliative care, labour market exclusion, energy poverty, vulnerable families, regional disparities and access to other public goods that neither the state nor the market is

adequately providing. In this sense, social innovation allows institutions and communities to organise responses closer to people's lived realities, and in a more flexible and integrated way than standard provision allows.

Examples

[Territoires zéro chômeur de longue durée](#) (France) reverses the logic of long-term unemployment by designing jobs around the unmet territorial needs and the capacities and aspirations of people excluded from the labour market. According to the ESF+ case study, by 2024 the initiative had enabled around 4,000 people to exit unemployment through 92 employment-purpose companies in 83 territories, with 58% of participants women, an average age of 47, and 23% persons with disabilities. [The project's own results](#) platform now reports 85 participating territories, 93 enterprises created and 7,725 people who have exited employment deprivation.

The Belgian example, [Papillon](#), shows the same logic in another policy field. Papillon addresses energy poverty through a circular rental model for efficient household appliances aimed at low-income households. Instead of treating the issue only through one-off subsidies or leaving households to face the market alone, the project combines lower upfront costs, including maintenance, energy advice and social support. [The results](#) indicate that since 2018, 451 low-income families across 24 cities in Flanders were provided with energy-efficient household appliances within contracts for a period of ten years, with average electricity savings of 666 kWh per household per year. The model had already been replicated in Czechia, and the leading organisation is using the positive project experience to influence Flemish and Belgian energy-poverty policy.

Another strong example is [Dăruiește Viață / #NoiFacemUnSpital](#) (Romania), a national civic-systemic initiative focused on healthcare infrastructure and public-system improvement, that emerged in response to a field where public delivery gaps were highly visible and where conventional institutional responses had proven insufficient. What makes the case relevant is the mechanism of large-scale civic mobilisation and cross-sector support that turned into a practical model for improving public infrastructure through coordinated citizen and business participation. More than 350,000 individuals and 8,000 companies contributed to the initiative, which perfectly illustrates how social innovation can help address structural weaknesses in public systems through new forms of mobilisation, legitimacy and implementation capacity.

Social innovation requires dedicated and flexible funding because experimentation is part of its core logic

A recurring argument across countries is that social innovation depends on the capacity to test, adapt and refine new approaches in real conditions. This is structurally different from service delivery because it requires room for iteration, for learning from partial failure, and for combining actors and resources in ways that standard funding schemes often do not allow. Without clear support, many local actors are pushed back into short-term delivery or excluded altogether, even when they are best placed to identify new solutions.

Examples

The Italian example of [ToNite](#) shows what this kind of experimentation can look like in practice. In Turin, the project combined co-designed urban inclusion measures with physical regeneration to address perceptions of insecurity at night. It invested EUR 1.5 million in the regeneration of three target areas and EUR 1 million in 19 local projects and services aimed at improving the quality of life and safety in the Dora river area. Importantly, the project also became the starting point for a wider regeneration trajectory, linked to four additional investment programmes, nine strategic projects, around EUR 10 million in public interventions in 2024, and a further EUR 40 million from 2024 onwards.

The same logic is visible in [the Latvian](#) example project, [Vouchers](#), for the provision of flexible childminder service to workers with nonstandard work schedules, which was explicitly designed as an experimentally tested intervention. With a budget of just over EUR 1 million, the project tested a voucher-based childcare model for workers in Riga, Jelgava and Valmiera whose jobs require evening, night, weekend or variable shifts. It planned support for 150 potential recipients, allowed up to 20 hours of childcare per week per employed parent, and was

structured around experimental and control groups in order to test not only service demand, but also whether a longer-term co-financing and self-regulation model could work in practice. Following this success, more recently, Latvia backed a selection round for innovative community-based social services, approving [12 projects \(from 139 ideas received\)](#), each getting between EUR 80,000 and EUR 300,000 for the development and piloting of new services.

The main challenge is not a lack of ideas, but weak pathways to continuity and scale

The results of the consultation show that Europe has a promising pool of social innovation initiatives, but what is missing too often is the continuity of support needed to move from pilot stage to broader adoption, replication and mainstream integration. This is particularly problematic in the context of the next MFF if social innovation is not more evidently and intentionally encouraged. Stopping clear support too early could mean halting current projects, and increased risks of wasting earlier EU investment, accumulated knowledge, local capacity and trust built with communities. The [Ashoka–McKinsey study](#) estimated that scaling existing social innovations could generate around EUR 18 billion in annual economic value in Germany alone, suggesting that the main bottleneck is diffusion and uptake into wider systems. Respondents in the consultation provided several examples that support this logic.

Examples

Created by the Portuguese Government, [Portugal Social Innovation](#) is a pioneering public initiative designed to promote social innovation and develop the social investment market. Rather than supporting isolated projects, it operates as a systemic instrument that mobilises European Funds to finance, scale and consolidate innovative solutions to social challenges. What makes it particularly innovative is its integrated approach, combining grants with financial instruments, fostering partnerships between public, private and social sector actors, and promoting a culture of impact measurement and accountability. In terms of scale, the results are significant. Under the [Portugal 2020 Partnership Agreement](#), it has supported 689 social innovation projects across the country and under the [current Portugal 2030 framework](#), 483 projects are already being funded with a measurable impact on thousands of beneficiaries.

FoodCloud (Ireland) is a strong example of what happens when a social innovation is allowed to move beyond the pilot stage. Built as a tech-enabled model linking surplus food suppliers with charities and community groups, it has grown from a local initiative into a cross-border system, active across 5 markets in Ireland, Europe, and Africa. In [2024, FoodCloud](#) reports redistributing 79 million meal equivalents across six countries by rescuing 33,230 tonnes of surplus food (that is 150 meals a minute). The start-up launched in [2013 with support from government grants](#) and continued to receive support in multiple rounds, helping the project grow in scale to the point that it could attract funds through seeding rounds and direct investors, making it the large-scale impact project of today.

Input from Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, France, Portugal and Romania all pointed to the same structural lesson: if successful social innovation is not followed by sustained support, Europe risks repeatedly funding promising starts without securing durable outcomes.

Social innovation strengthens territorial cohesion because it translates broad policy objectives into locally adapted solutions through collaboration

Another strong pattern in the consultation is the territorial and collaborative character of social innovation. Respondents repeatedly describe it as a way of connecting public authorities, civil society, academia, businesses, investors and communities under the quadruple helix of collaboration around concrete local problems, often where top-down delivery is too distant from real conditions. This is particularly relevant for the future MFF architecture, which places strong emphasis on National and Regional Partnership Plans and on maximising the impact of investment across territories, thus social innovation could highly and effectively contribute by

delivering services locally, improving how local actors work together, how public spaces are used, how communities are engaged, and how trust and shared ownership are built around solutions.

Examples

The Italian experience of [Shared Management of Common Goods](#) is a particularly relevant example of social innovation as a place-based governance tool. Since the pilot launched by the [Municipality of Bologna](#) in 2014, more than 300 municipalities and other local authorities have adopted specific regulations enabling this model, and it is estimated that over 8,000 collaboration agreements have been signed, involving at least one million citizens. The core instrument is the collaboration agreement, through which citizens and a public authority jointly define the terms for the care, regeneration or use of tangible or intangible common goods. These agreements specify the public interest to be safeguarded, the objectives pursued, the resources and capacities contributed by each party, the duration of the collaboration and the respective responsibilities. What makes this model particularly innovative is its capacity to involve actors that often remain outside traditional associative or contractual frameworks, including informal groups, neighbourhood residents and ad hoc committees united by a shared interest in caring for a specific common good. In practice, it has been used for initiatives ranging from the maintenance and cleaning of squares, public gardens and parks, to minor urban regeneration and public art projects, as well as cultural, educational and community events.

The Latvian example of [Viskali](#) / Free Riga is also illustrative. The initiative is transforming a former university building of 15,000 square metres, with more than 200 rooms, into a social innovation and community hub with a focus on cultural and educational activities, circular economy practices and the adaptive reuse of public infrastructure, including the hosting of hundreds of cultural events, workshops and international delegations each year. Only in 2024, they have organised 701 cultural events and classes with approximately 18,600 participants, bringing together more than 200 entrepreneurs, activists and other residents.

Another good example is [Ecologists without Borders](#). Developed under the Slovenian initiative *Let's Clean Slovenia in One Day!*, using data mapping, more than 115,000 illegal dumpsites were identified, and by mobilising over 270,000 citizens, 12,000 tons of waste were removed, becoming a national civic movement.

These examples show that social innovation should not be understood only through the lens of social services. It is also a practical method for territorial mobilisation, participatory governance and more place-based delivery of public value.

Beyond social protection, social innovation contributes to competitiveness, skills development, sustainability, culture and long-term prosperity

The consultation indicates that social innovation should not be reduced to compensatory welfare action or to the post-management of social damage. In practice, many of the strongest examples combine social aims with economic, environmental, educational, cultural or technological value creation. This is important for the next MFF because it broadens the relevance of social innovation far beyond traditional social policy, and it aligns with the wider argument that the Union's future competitiveness should be understood not only in terms of market performance, but also in terms of its capacity to generate quality jobs, social resilience, sustainable business models and innovations that improve everyday life.

Examples

[JOBLINGE](#) (Germany) creates structured pathways for young people with poor starting conditions, who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). The programme brings together businesses, government, and civil society to support participants through mentoring, skills training, and early hands-on work experience. Each participant receives individual coaching and direct exposure to employers, increasing real-world readiness. The initiative has achieved strong results, with around 75–80% of participants entering training or employment and

over 17,000 young people supported nationwide. Beyond individual outcomes, it helps reduce skills shortages and improves social mobility, demonstrating a scalable model for inclusive labor market integration.

In Croatia, [Book&Zvook](#), the country's first and still only audiobook publisher, has built a user base of around 15,000 users and published more than 200 books, combining accessibility, literacy and cultural preservation, particularly for children with dyslexia and other groups for whom conventional reading formats are less accessible. The company also has a contract with public libraries, and the audiobooks can be rented via public libraries.

In Luxembourg, [Dalza](#), a tech solution supporting neurodivergent children and their care networks, was recognised as Global Champion in Learning & Education at the World Summit Awards, a competition that drew more than 900 entries from over 100 countries. The start-up created a secure platform that brings together in a collaborative space every person involved in a child's care: parents, educators, therapists, family members, and even au pairs. From medical assessments and school reports to insights on personality, milestones, and emotional triggers, Dalza creates a holistic view of the child, including features that allow children themselves to participate in their own care journeys, giving them a voice and ownership over their development.

The Commission's proposal already contains openings that can support this take through the competitiveness framework, as it mentions that special support may be granted for access to finance for SMEs and small mid-caps, including microfinance and support to social enterprises. Horizon Europe also remains relevant because the future architecture continues to connect competitiveness with research and innovation across the full project journey, from conception to scale-up. The issue remains the lack of deliberate recognition of socially innovative and impact-driven business models within them. The competitiveness and innovation architecture should more clearly recognise socially innovative businesses, social enterprises and other impact-driven models as part of Europe's innovation capacity, including through access to finance, market uptake, deployment, scale-up and experimentation in sectors linked to the clean transition, labour inclusion and quality jobs.

The cases presented above show that social innovation contributes to social inclusion, but also to labour activation, skills formation, circularity, accessibility and the development of more relevant business models, all of which are directly relevant to Europe's broader competitiveness agenda.

Social innovation reflected in current national policy frameworks and its missing potential in the MFF proposal

Based on the current state of affairs within the 14 countries consulted, in most Member States, social innovation is still not anchored through a single, mature, standalone national strategy. Much more often, it is recognised indirectly through adjacent frameworks, most notably social economy and social enterprise policies, but also through social inclusion plans, research and innovation agendas, public sector innovation strategies, or EU-funded programme priorities.

Only a few countries referred to something close to a dedicated or clearly articulated framework. This is the case of **Germany** which has a [National Strategy for Social Innovations and Social Enterprises](#); **Portugal** referred to the [Agenda for Impact 2030](#) that sets out a long-term vision for strengthening the social innovation ecosystem and the social investment market; **Slovakia** pointed to a broader set of anchors including a dedicated priority on "Social Innovation and Experiments" under Programme Slovakia 2021–2027 (Slovakia), the Manifesto of the Government of the SR (2023–2027) which explicitly commits to supporting social innovation as a tool to increase societal resilience and modernize the welfare, and the National Strategy for R&D and Innovation 2030 where SI is defined as a key alternative to traditional, often failing tools in areas such as inclusion, generational poverty, and education. **Luxembourg** also reported that a national strategy is being finalised following the Global Government Summit on Social Innovation and the [Luxembourg Declaration](#). In the same line, National Competence Centres

for Social Innovation in other states like Italy, **Romania, Croatia and Slovenia** have recently developed proposals for National Strategies for Social Innovation within projects powered by [the European Social Fund Plus Social Innovation+ initiative](#).

The results of the consultation indicate that the social economy area is the most common policy entry point identified, where social innovation is mentioned or emerges as a priority. **Spain** referred to the Spanish Social Economy Strategy 2023–2027, the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan, and local and regional inclusion and employment programmes. **Ireland** referred to [Trading for Impact: National Social Enterprise Policy 2024–2027](#). France pointed to the art. 15 from the Loi ESS 2014 that defines social innovation in the French Law on the social and solidarity economy, and social innovation is also embedded into the upcoming National Strategy on Social Economy. **Slovenia** also referred to the [Social Economy Strategy 2025–2035](#) and the Development Strategy 2030 that emphasises the role of social innovation in sustainable development, quality of life, and inclusive growth. The same pattern is visible in **Latvia** and **Romania**. This is not a weakness in itself because in many countries it has been the practical doorway through which support has emerged. However, this has often left social innovation only partially visible as a broader implementation approach relevant beyond traditional social policy, despite the evidence from the country examples showing that social innovation already operates across sectors, scales and territories, often through helix-type collaboration between public authorities, private actors, academia, civil society and ecosystem intermediaries. In other words, the problem is not that social economy is an entry point, but that the broader implementation value of social innovation is still not sufficiently recognised in policy design and without further EU recognition in the next MFF, it risks remaining that way.

Many of the examples present initiatives that have already reached a significant scale. Therefore, the reality is that social innovation is advancing in practice while policy support is still lagging behind. Although on this note, it is important to credit the progress that has been made through the ESF+ Social Innovation+ initiative through several instruments, including the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation, EU-level calls for proposals, five Communities of Practice, the Social Innovation Match database, National Competence Centres for Social Innovation, and the EaSI strand. In the past year, many participating NCCs have developed concrete proposals for National Strategies on Social Innovation, based on input from hundreds of organisations and actors active in their national ecosystems of social innovation. [The Romanian process illustrates](#) the value of this infrastructure well, as the consultation coordinated by the Romanian NCC mobilised over 120 organisations from 33 counties and translated that process into priorities on skills, impact measurement, visibility, flexible finance and ecosystem connectivity, including reference to matchfunding and the need to preserve strong ESF+ support in the proposal for the National Strategy on Social Innovation.

The European Competence Centre has also generated visible outputs that help make the case for continuation after 2027. According to the [Commission's monitoring report on the EaSI strand, the ESF+ Social Innovation+ initiative](#) launched three major calls in 2023 (ALMA, National Competence Centres and Skills for Vulnerable Youth), while the European Competence Centre organised 33 events with 2,247 participants, produced analytical reports and ecosystem mapping studies, and developed the Social Innovation Match database to 465 examples from 27 countries [by the end of 2025](#). Furthermore, the [Social Innovation Forum 2025](#) brought together more than 250 participants from 29 countries to discuss mainstreaming, resilience and the role of ESF+ in embedding social innovation in public policy, which is another important sign of this growing momentum.

Taken together, these developments suggest that social innovation is advancing in practice faster than it is being stabilised in policy. This makes its framing in the next MFF particularly important, because in many contexts, EU-level recognition, programme design and funding continuity remain essential for moving social innovation from scattered practice to stable policy support. For that reason, the next MFF will either way influence future social innovation efforts and will determine whether the progress already made under the current period is consolidated, diluted or interrupted.

Key messages to be reflected in the next MFF negotiations and implementation framework.

1. *Recognise social innovation as a transversal delivery approach in the next MFF.*

Social innovation should be acknowledged not only under social policy, but as a cross-cutting method that can strengthen the delivery of EU priorities in employment, inclusion, education, health, housing, territorial development, competitiveness, resilience and the green transition.

2. *Ensure explicit and visible support for social innovation in the National and Regional Partnership Plans and the EU-level Facility.*

The future architecture should encourage Member States and regions to further integrate social innovation approaches within reforms, strategies, investments and territorial implementation, building on the efforts and developments conducted under the last MFF. Furthermore, the EU-level Facility should provide a clearer and stronger framework for social innovation actions with dedicated support systems and funding objectives.

3. *Preserve and strengthen dedicated support for social innovation through the European Social Fund and related social investment instruments.*

The 14% proposed social expenditure target is welcome, but part of this effort should be explicitly directed towards social innovation, so that funding can support preventive, systemic and scalable solutions rather than only short-term or compensatory measures.

4. *Integrate social innovation more deliberately into the EU's competitiveness, innovation and business support framework.*

Socially innovative businesses, social enterprises and other impact-driven models should be better reflected in competitiveness instruments, including support for finance, scale-up, market uptake and innovation deployment, recognising their contribution to both economic and social prosperity.

5. *Strengthen support for ecosystem infrastructure, competence centres, intermediaries and capacity-building.*

Effective social innovation depends not only on individual projects, but also on the organisations and support structures that enable experimentation, knowledge transfer, partnership-building, impact measurement and scaling. These functions should be recognised as essential infrastructure for implementation and supported accordingly.

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