



Summary Report
ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform
Community of Practice on Social Innovation Plenary Meeting
21-22 June 2021, online

The Community of Practice chair, Patricia Borges (Portugal), thanked everyone for their collaboration and highlighted important elements of the current work programme: providing capacity-building for those new to social innovation, enhancing the understanding of scaling-up, offering opportunities for managing authorities to work on specific challenges in small groups¹.

The meeting was divided into four sessions:

1	Community of Practice: state of play and key messages from past events	2	Introducing the projects on competence centres for social innovation	3	Putting ESF regulation into practice: example of social innovation in Finland	4	Development of a continued work programme of the Community of Practice
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CoP Social Innovation: State of Play

The Community of Practice (CoP) on Social Innovation is one of four communities within the [ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform](#). It gives its over 100 members – managing authorities, intermediate bodies, other ESF stakeholders and the six projects working to establish competence centres for social innovation – the possibility to actively participate in a variety of mutual learning activities to tackle common challenges together (see Box 1 for summary of past meetings). The main aim of the Community of Practice on Social Innovation is to strengthen Member States’ capacity to programme and deliver on social innovation under the ESF+.



The exchanges in the last months has brought a sense of belonging to a much wider network of committed stakeholders to social innovation, where we found many like-minded people with whom we can maintain a shared space for learning.

Vera Egreja Barracho, Portugal Social Innovation

¹ The online event, organised by the Transnationality Team on behalf of the European Commission, was attended by 89 participants who represented ESF managing authorities, intermediate bodies, national competence centres for social innovation from 25 EU Member States: AT, BE, BG, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, UK. In addition, the European Commission officers and Stephen J. Barnett (Lead Thematic Expert) also attended the event.

Box 1. Key messages from past activities

- **Peer to Peer training: Social Innovation in ESF Programmes with Peer Pioneers** (1-2 February 2021)
 - Social innovation has a set definition in the ESF context (Article 2(8), ESF+ Regulation)².
 - It is important to analyse who is playing which of the six ecosystem roles (activator, browser, creator, developer, executor, facilitator) to identify the gaps and missing connections.
 - Managing authorities should take a long view of developing and scaling social innovation projects over the entire programming period.
 - When preparing a call for social innovation, managing authorities should be clear what stage of social innovation they are targeting and how successful projects might progress through the stages.
 - Managing authorities should encourage and resource promoters to build impact assessment into project design from the start.
- **Webinar and workshop on scaling-up social innovation** (30 March 2021, 30 April 2021)
 - Social innovation should not only be good in terms of its defined objectives but should enhance societal capacity to act, i.e. to generate new ways of doing, which can be scaled up, and in some cases mainstreamed in the (welfare) systems of the society.
 - A pre-requisite for scaling of any kind should be that we know that it works, but the evidence is not enough ensure scaling.
 - There are different routes or strategies for scaling, but often innovations spread by coincidence without a conscious strategy.
 - Managing authorities can assess the level of evidence of impact in various ways. As a minimum, the project logic needs to explain the potential impact. More comprehensive assessments can include independent evaluations of the approach in different settings.
 - Social enterprises may be comfortable with the language of 'scaling', but public authorities may prefer 'rolling out' or policy transfer. Underneath the linguistic differences, there are similarities in the behaviours that favour scaling.
 - Demand for social innovation (and by extension, scaling) is as important as its supply: i.e. whether governments or other funders (facilitators) want to tackle a given societal challenge.
- **Workshop on ESF and Community-Led Local Development (CLLD)** (12-13 April 2021)
 - CLLD initiatives build trust and close personal connections between Local Action Groups, beneficiaries and target groups that can, in turn, lead to a better diagnosis of needs and increased participation of target groups in activities.
 - Experimentation should be encouraged at all levels to reach out to 'unusual' partners, who could fuel innovation.

² 'Social innovation' means an activity, that is social both as to its ends and its means and in particular an activity which relates to the development and implementation of new ideas concerning products, services, practices and models, that simultaneously meets social needs and creates new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil society or private organisations, thereby benefiting society and boosting its capacity to act.



Full summaries of past events are available on the CoP MS Teams space.

[Click here to join the CoP on Social Innovation to get access!](#)

One of the past events was Action Learning Set. This event started with a dilemma of managing authority; then participants solve the problem by exchanging solutions with their peers. Austria was one of the five countries (next to Belgium, Ireland, Greece and Portugal) that presented a dilemma.



The Action Learning Set clarified what our exact problem was and how to address it. Having input from other Managing Authorities was also useful to develop new ideas.

Julie Dalmoro, Federal Ministry of Labour, Austria

Box 2. Reporting back from Action Learning Set (Austria)

The Austrian Managing Authority plans to apply elements of the Community-Led Local Development approach under ESF+ to incentivise innovative projects that aim to increase women's participation in the labour market. Additionally, the Austrian Managing Authority seeks to devolve more responsibilities to the regions to implement social innovation under Article 14 of the ESF+ Regulation.

After the March meeting of the Action Learning Set, the Austrian Managing Authority met with the intermediate bodies to discuss the concept of social innovation and their planned activities in the country using the materials from the peer-to-peer training and the [Flanders toolkit](#). The intermediate bodies provided constructive feedback and scheduled the next meeting to discuss an update on the ESF+ Programme.

Forthcoming: Toolkit on scaling-up social innovation

To ensure further benefits from mutual learning, the CoP is preparing a toolkit on scaling-up innovative practices. When asked how they would use the toolkit, more than half the participants responded that they would use it to start a conversation about how scaling-up could help tackling social problems. The second most popular response was to advocate for new ways of working with and within the government. Other participants planned to offer training on scaling innovative practices.

Laying the groundwork for national competence centres for social innovation

The European Commission is currently supporting six projects building national competence centres for social innovation. For two years (May 2021-May 2023), ESF managing authorities, social innovation support organisations, research centres and other involved partners design and develop competence centres, which can help their countries to promote social innovation, including with funding from ESF+ and other EU programmes. These competence centres are expected to have the following functions:

- building the capacity of all stakeholders,
- networking among stakeholders and developing synergies between the different European funding schemes, and
- setting up a transnational exchange among national competence centres.

<p>Pan-European Social Innovation Lab (PEnCIL)</p> <p>PEnCIL builds national competence centres for social innovation in Belgium, Czechia, Finland and Lithuania.</p>	<p>Social Innovation Plus (SI PLUS)</p> <p>SI PLUS builds national competence centres for social innovation in Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia.</p>
<p>National Competence Centres for Social Innovation</p> <p>The project builds national competence centres for social innovation in Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Poland and UK.</p>	<p>Building Capacity for a Sustainable Society (BuiCaSuS)</p> <p>BuiCaSuS project builds national competence centres for social innovation in France, Latvia, Spain and Sweden.</p>
<p>Facilitating United Approached to Social Innovation in Europe (FUSE)</p> <p>FUSE builds national competence centres for social innovation in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ireland and Portugal.</p>	<p>Social Innovation Ecosystem Development (SEED)</p> <p>SEED builds national competence centres for social innovation in Greece, Italy, Romania and Slovenia.</p>



Factsheets about projects building competence centres for social innovation will be available soon on **the ESF+ website**.

From ESF+ Regulation into practice: social innovation priorities

When CoP members were asked how likely ESF+ Programmes in their respective countries would focus on specific objectives, the most common answer was that the social innovation within ESF would promote 2-5 specific objectives. In most cases, social innovation will be programmed at multiple levels (regional and national). There are, however, important differences in approaches.

For example, Portugal uses a top-down approach to social innovation in which the government promotes social innovation and stimulates the social investment market in the country. Portugal successfully created an intermediate body to convert the national ecosystem into a field capable of developing new projects. They seek to spread social innovation throughout regions by assessing the impact of their social innovation projects to improve their implementation and success. To overcome context-specific challenges, Portugal will strengthen the capacity building of national stakeholders and combine public and private financing. Czechia, by contrast, currently has a wide priority axis on social innovation and plans to focus on one important societal challenge soon to be identified. Finland has already decided to focus on child welfare for its social innovation priority in ESF+ Programme, as it is an important issue in the country.

Box 3. Social innovation priority in Finland

In its draft proposal, subject to further discussion and the European Commission agreement, Finland has chosen to focus social innovation priority on child welfare. This thematic focus aligns with two ESF+ objectives – promoting employment, skills and inclusion and addressing material deprivation.

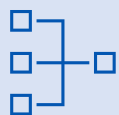
Finland will combine top-down and bottom-up approaches in implementation of social innovation priority:



The draft organisation of social innovation priority is based on the linkage between different actors at regional, national, and European levels. It will include:



The national managing group comprises representatives from different national ministries, institutions, education, child protection organisations, and experts. It will discuss the needs related to the priority axis and share knowledge on legal, qualitative, and ethical aspects. This knowledge exchange will guide the implementation stage.



The intermediate bodies will select and oversee the implementation of the different projects within the priority. The one intermediate body will coordinate the various projects across the country, while the other three intermediate bodies will oversee beneficiaries.



At the European level, Finland is a partner in the **PEnCIL project** and aims to establish **a national competence centre** that will mainstream and scale up national and European-level activities on social innovation by exchanging practices with the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation and other projects. In addition, the priority on child welfare may also support other social innovation projects related to other ESF+ objectives.

The work programme for 2021-2022 of the CoP on Social Innovation

The plenary meeting saw participants working together in small groups to create their ideal work programme for September 2021 to December 2022.

The Transnationality Team have synthesised the discussions into a single proposal. The work programme builds on the activities already started within the CoP, adding a new special project aligned with the core work of the competence centres for social innovation.

The members of the community will work on the projects listed below:

Peer Pioneers: social innovation kick starters (continuation)

The project involves managing authority officials and ESF stakeholders who worked on social innovation under the programming period 2014-2020 and those who were amongst the front runners in drafting social innovation priorities under ESF+ Programmes. Through virtual peer-to-peer support and mutual learning, members draw on lessons from top-performing managing authorities on social innovation to consider how they could use those plans and indicators as inspiration and apply them to their context, challenges and opportunities.

Community-led local development (CLLD) with a focus on practices with an innovative component (continuation)

The special project focuses on providing evidence on the successful use of CLLD approach to capture social innovation at the local level. Community members reflect on how to programme CLLD under the ESF+ (i.e. mistakes to be avoided, challenges identified by managing authorities, capacity building needs) building on the experience of ESF in the 2014-2020 programming period as well as other EU programmes. The CoP members and relevant stakeholders will receive study report prepared under this special project.

Beyond innovation: Scaling-up/Replicating/Scaling across (continuation)

The project aims to develop a more systematic evidence-based approach in planning, implementing and assessing social innovation. By revising existing ESF social innovation projects, the CoP members will identify approaches and key elements to facilitate the scaling-up and transferability of promising social invocation projects. The toolkit prepared under this project will provide strategic steps that managing authorities can take to scale successful social innovations.

Competence centres for social innovation (new)

This special project aims to facilitate exchanges on the core tasks of the competence centres for social innovation projects. Ahead of each mutual learning activity interviews will be conducted with the representatives of competence centres to help enable them to unblock potential problems or issues encountered, identify advanced practices and insights and ways to share those during the CoP plenary meetings or dedicated sessions only for the competence centres project. The mutual learning exchanges under this special project will focus on the following core themes:

- **Social innovation ecosystem mapping:** will recap guidance on what roles should be played in a social innovation ecosystem and spotlight selected competence centres' approaches to social innovation ecosystem mapping to facilitate a degree of comparability and common understanding across all Member States.
- **Scaling-up:** drawing on the forthcoming toolkit on scaling-up (developed under special project 'Beyond innovation'), it will outline the concept of scaling-up, feature real examples of projects in the process of scaling by the competence centre projects, consider how scaling-up leads to systems change and what persuades policymakers to make a change. It will also extend our scope by looking at blending ESF with other forms of financing – EU funding, philanthropy and trading.
- **Mutual learning:** will facilitate connections and exchanges between the projects about what works particularly well and seek structured reflections on how managing authorities and competence centres stakeholders can reach out to each other.
- **Design and governance of the competence centres:** will concern the design, functions, funding and governance of the planned national competence centres for social innovation. We will notably discuss how they pull together the expertise, how

they can become recognised by relevant stakeholders and how their cooperation and exchange of information with ESF managing authorities is organised.

The planned activities include:

		2021		2022	
Agenda Items		CoP Plenary meeting, 6-7 October	CoP Plenary meeting, February-March	CoP Plenary meeting, April-May	October-December
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of dedicated social innovation priorities in ESF+ • Exchange of ecosystem mapping methodologies by the competence centres projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of dedicated social innovation priorities in ESF+ • Discussion on the scaling-up tool created by the CoP • Exchange of mutual learning tools used by the competence centres projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange on the various models of competence centres in the Member States • Ways to organise the relations between the competence centres, ESF managing authorities and the wider social innovation community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CoP will continue its activities under the new European Competence centre for social innovation

Forthcoming: ESF Social Innovation+ initiative

In the future, the ESF transnational cooperation will be organised as part of the ESF Social Innovation+ initiative³. It will be organised by the forthcoming 'European Competence Centre for Social Innovation'.

The European Competence Centre for Social Innovation will build on the work carried out by the current CoPs. It will pull together the available knowledge and data from national competence centres and from the larger social innovation community.

In addition, the ESF Social Innovation+ initiative will include a grant scheme to support transnational projects facilitating transfer and scaling-up of social innovations.

Next steps

- An in-depth study on ESF-funded Community-led Local Development (CLLD) will be consulted with the CoP this autumn.
- The social innovation database, tested by the CoP members in July, will be launched later in 2021.
- Factsheets about the competence centre projects will be published on [the ESF+ website](#) in October 2021. CoP members will receive a notification.
- The next CoP meeting is planned for 6-7 October 2021.
- European Week of Regions and Cities (#EURegionsWeek) will include a session on "Competence Centres for social innovation: what is there for regions and cities". The event will take place online on 13 October at 9:30 CEST. To register for the event, please click [here](#).

³ See: Selection of an entrusted entity for the indirect management of the initiative ESF Social Innovation+ | European Social Fund Plus (europa.eu)