



Summary Report

ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform

Community of Practice on Social Innovation

Second plenary meeting

6-7 October 2021, online

Risto Raivio (European Commission) opened the plenary meeting¹ by thanking participants for their collaboration and provided an update on the ESF Social Innovation+ initiative. He highlighted the important points that would be discussed during the plenary session, including: the new elements of the draft ESF+ programmes, reflections on how managing authorities and competence centre projects can better cooperate, the methodology for mapping studies by the competence centre projects, and the guidance on what roles should be played in a social innovation ecosystem. Back-to-back with the plenary meeting, a closed session was dedicated to issues relevant to competence centre projects.

Box 1. ESF Social Innovation+ initiative

Current call for expression of interest by the European Commission seeks to select the entity in charge of implementing the initiative ESF Social Innovation+.

This initiative will include two work streams, which both will emphasise the transfer and scaling-up of innovative practices. A grant scheme will include a variety of EU wide calls for proposals.

The other work stream is the European Competence Centre for social innovation. It will provide mutual learning activities to ensure the continuity of communities of practice on social innovation, employment, education and skills, and social inclusion. In addition it will collect and analyse and disseminate data on social innovation with a view of improving the EU level social innovation ecosystem. An important source of information will be the National competence centres for social innovation. They will play an important role in relation to all the different ways the ESF+ will support social innovation. In the future their transnational activities could be supported through the ESF Social Innovation+ grants.

Social innovation in ESF+ Programmes

Social innovation has a set definition in the ESF context (Article 2(8), ESF+ Regulation)². The regulation also requires that every Member State supports actions of social innovation

¹ The online event, organised by the Transnationality Team on behalf of the European Commission, was attended by 93 participants who represented ESF managing authorities, intermediate bodies, competence centres for social innovation from 25 countries: AT, BE, BG, CZ, CY, DE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LV, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, UK. In addition, the European Commission officers, OECD and Stephen J. Barnett (Lead Thematic Expert) also attended the event.

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.

and social experimentation. When the Community of Practice (CoP) members were asked whether in the social innovation programming is more important for ESF to focus on piloting / experimenting or scaling-up, the most common answer was that both are equally important. There are, however, important differences in the national approaches.

ESF+ social innovation priority in Poland

In the past programming periods, Poland implemented social innovation in ESF in different ways:

- general principle across Operational Programmes in 2007-2013, which resulted in low visibility of innovation, made it difficult to report back and mainstream the solutions,
- dedicated to social innovation priority in 2014-2020 Operational Programme.

Building on this experience Poland has foreseen in ESF+ a dedicated priority to social innovation within one national programme. The Managing Authority will directly manage projects in this priority. Allocation of EUR 205 million (1.7% of ESF+ national allocation) will support all ESF specific objectives. The plan is to further support beneficiaries to cooperate on a transnational EU level. Poland will focus more on scaling-up and so will test how well-established innovations can work in other contexts.

Box 2. Poland: Operations implementing social innovation and their indicators

Operation	Indicators
Macro-innovations including developing, testing, disseminating, and transferring the proven innovations to the policy and practices.	Output: the number of innovations accepted for funding
Micro-innovations comprising social experimentation, acceleration and designing the services of general interest using behavioural techniques.	Result: the number of tested innovations
Scaling-up the selected social innovations to implement them on a larger scale or transfer to other context.	Output: the number of social innovations subject to scaling Result: the number of scaled innovations
Development of the ecosystem for social innovations to facilitate their development and to promote a culture of experimenting for social innovations.	Output: number of functioning cooperation networks of entities dealing with social innovations Result: number of entities that received support in the field of disseminating the idea of social innovation

Social innovation in the Netherlands within ESF+

The Netherlands adopts a targeted approach on social innovation by addressing the challenge of equal opportunities on the labour market and ensure sustainable and inclusive employment. For the general ESF+ program, the Managing Authority will work closely with municipalities, social partners and educational institutions to support them in preparing and implementing projects to help disadvantaged groups, both on and off the labour market, to find or maintain sustainable employment. To further achieve equal outcomes and find innovative solutions for persisting challenges which hamper and inclusive workforce, the Netherlands will dedicate 4% of the total ESF+ funds to social innovation and three different thematic calls will be launched by the Monitoring Committee ESF+.

social innovation aspect in the calls entails that the main purpose is not holding or finding employment but:

- providing more equal opportunities when working and/or,
- encouraging regional organisations and authorities to efficiently work together to provide for sustainable and quality employment.

Box 3. Netherlands: Calls for social innovation in the ESF+ Programme

Each call accounts for a **two-year period with a budget of EUR 5.5 million**, the first thematic **call is to focus on gender equality** promoting 50/50 gender participation challenge since the gender-employment gap is a persisting problem in the Netherlands. The challenge is to work towards equal opportunities in the labour market, provide quality and healthy employment (including work-life balance), improve women's opportunities in the labour market and improve pay equality.

- The call will challenge companies and/or sectors to find new approaches to have more equal opportunities through employee engagement and engagement of women and of men in sectors where either is under-represented.
- Managing Authority will launch a thematic call to select a scientific institution or NGOs with a proven expertise on gender equality. The winner of the call will:



promote the challenge



select companies / sectors that will strive to find new solutions for more equal opportunities



support these companies / sectors



ensure that the experiences and knowledge gained from this project **will be made publicly available for other companies** to work on their gender equal opportunities

- **Recommendations arising from the first call will be considered to improve the procedure of scaling up in ESF+ projects**, for example through testing and experimentation.
- The thematic focus of the other two calls will be specified during the programming period by Monitoring Committee to ensure it address a pressing challenge at that moment.

Social innovations in Czechia within ESF+

In 2014-2020 Czechia has supported 78 projects within the social innovation priority. In the future, 2% of the total ESF+ funds will be dedicated to social innovation priority that will draw on previous experience and lessons learned i.e. from 'Housing First' [pilot project](#). Based on this and past experiences the Czech Managing Authority is looking for beneficiaries who are willing to learn, test and adapt and who aim to save public funds in the longer term.

Two types of calls for projects are planned under the ESF+ Employment Programme:

- Incubation projects where the beneficiary (e.g. NGO) rapidly tests what works best for a particular target group. The results are implemented in longer and higher funded implementation phase, in which the beneficiary develops in detail the new working method with a target group.
- Multiplier projects where the beneficiary (e.g. university) knows about a solution that could be of relevance for other organisations. Beneficiaries are expected to evaluate their solutions in various settings and share lessons learned with entities

across Czechia. Thus, the beneficiary would act as a multiplier which in turn can lead to scaling-up for other relevant projects.



Exchanges among us on the programming of social innovation and scaling has increased our understanding on the state of play of social innovation within ESF+. For example, the Czechia 'learn – test – adapt' approach has been very inspiring, and it will be interesting to test it in other national contexts.

Cristina Pojoga, SEED project, Romania

Cooperation between competence centres projects and ESF+ bodies

Competence centres are intended to provide the expertise and support for the managing authorities to:

- assess the (national) social innovation ecosystem,
- assist ESF bodies in the design and implementation of ESF+ priorities on social innovation,
- build the capacity of social innovation promoters, and
- create and facilitate national and transnational networks of social innovation.

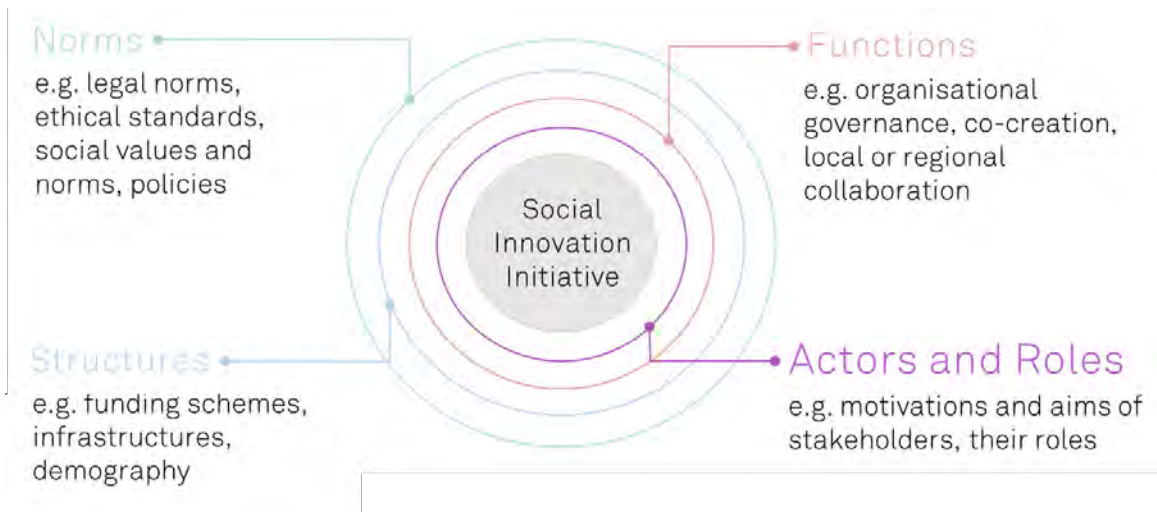
They can help managing authorities to better utilise the resources in the ESF+ and to better support the social innovation. The cooperation between the competence centres projects and ESF managing authorities is going well in most countries. A number of Member States have advisory boards or steering committees in place involving the ESF managing authorities.

In a few Member States, however, this cooperation did not take place yet or there are difficulties in establishing an open dialogue with the ESF managing authorities.

Spotlight on social innovation ecosystem mapping by competence centre projects

The European Commission has resourced the transnational projects to map the social innovation ecosystem with the aim of analysing its strengths and weaknesses and to create a joint blueprint for a strategy and action plan to advance social innovation in the country. At national level, the results of the mapping will provide an overview of the social innovation ecosystem, synthesising the needs, opportunities and priorities of stakeholders.

Representing the European Social Innovation Alliance (ESIA), a German partner presented their project's mapping approach, which features a five parallel mapping exercises across Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom. Partners already exchanged knowledge to form a common understanding and approach to social innovation and to define the clear roles of the actors involved in the process. The 'onion model' will be used to map the ecosystem at macro, meso and micro level across four layers with key guiding questions on specific elements of social innovation in Germany and possibly also in other ESIA partner countries.



Source: Kaletka et al. 2016

Italian partner from the Social Innovation Ecosystem Development (SEED) project explained that their starting point was to recognise that each Member State had different priorities and each ecosystem had different characteristics. The partners dedicated a lot of time to set the scene to have a common understanding of what to map and why.

Box 4. SEED mapping methodology

To collect information for the design and implementation of competence centres and to provide an in-depth analysis of the national social innovation ecosystem the countries have designed two different data collection processes:

- **Bottom-up social innovation data collection:** to identify and map social innovation practices and organisations (both profits and non-profits) in all partner countries.
- **Top-down social innovation data collection:** to identify and map public sector institutional actors and practices (policies, measures, resources) representing potential to create the conditions for commitment in the development of social innovation competence centres.

Bottom-up →	<p>Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative solutions • Solutions that even if small right now, can be scalable or replicable <p>Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation information • Description of the social innovation • Impact and support 	<p>Focus</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available funds and funding opportunities (including ESF or other public initiatives at the EU, national and local level) • Top-down initiatives that could be used to promote, upscale and mainstream social innovation <p>Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data institution • Funding framework • Objectives • Type of initiative 	Top-down ↓
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This approach will work from setting the scene with a working definition of social innovation for SEED through the mapping exercise and culminating in four country reports and one overall mapping report.

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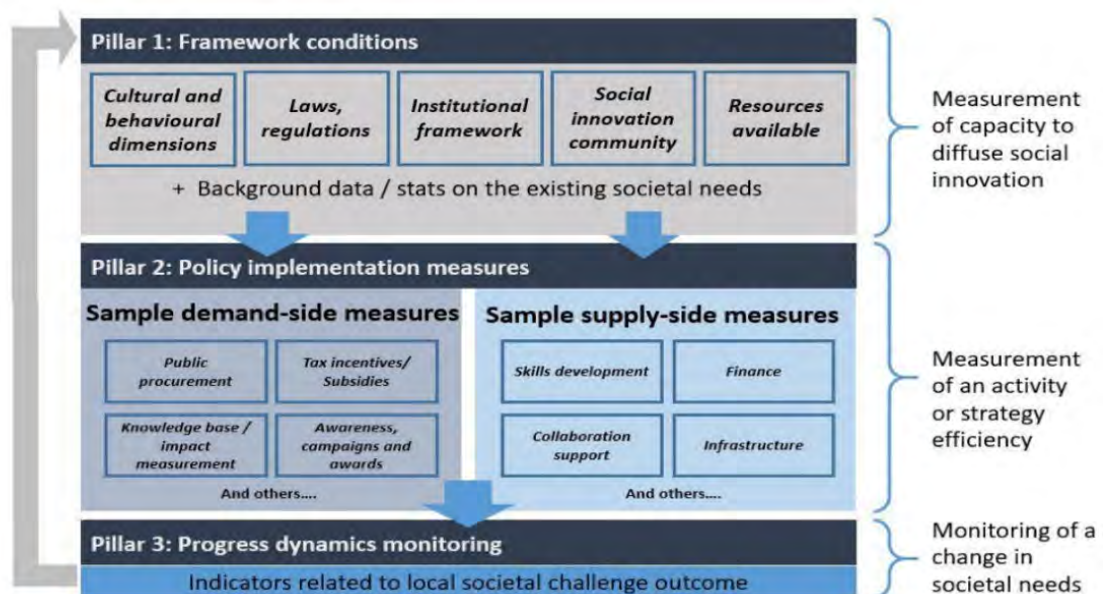
Listening to how other managing authorities are implementing social innovation ecosystem mapping has simplified the mapping exercise. It also clarified the steps that co-operating national managing authorities should take to reach a common approach on mapping social innovation.

Yuriy Dimitrov Vulkovsky, SI PLUS project, Bulgaria

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in its recently published paper on 'Building local ecosystems for social innovation' presents a preliminary framework for analysing ecosystems. The paper aims to support policy makers to analyse the situation and develop supporting policies for social innovation.

As shown in figure below, three pillars represent the context that enables or hampers social innovation:

- **Framework conditions** which help to describe the existing context surrounding the social innovation ecosystem at the local level.
- **Policy implementation measures** to analyse and understand how to implement variety of instruments and measures to support social innovation.
- **The progress dynamic monitoring** to identify the occurring changes to the framework conditions and to analyse the outcome of the measures that are taken in order to adjust the required policies. This pillar serves to analyse and adjust necessary measures based on the objectives and needs.



Approaches to support social innovation ecosystem

Managing authorities and social innovation actors presented their past experiences of mapping the social innovation ecosystem and noted how their findings were used to support it.

- Beginning with a favourable national context, especially regarding legislation which supported social innovations and entrepreneurship, helped developing a strong ecosystem – this was the case in France and Portugal.
- France found it more useful and relevant to map support structures (incubators, accelerators, national programmes, etc.) and funders (impact investors, banks, European funds, etc. and the type of funding provided), rather than mapping social innovation projects. The mapping showed a lack of support to scale-up programmes at national level. In Slovakia, the mapping identified fields that were in need of social innovation (e.g. health and the labour market).
- Having common definitions of key concepts such as social innovation and social entrepreneurship helps to create synergies and better align objectives between stakeholders. The definitions should be in line with the ESF+.

- Gaps in information on social innovation were spotted across stakeholders, meaning that additional focus should be placed on awareness-raising activities.

Box 6. Mapping the social innovation ecosystem in Portugal

Portugal mapped the social innovation ecosystem between 2013-2015 through:

- Desk research and identification by key observers existing initiatives and actors (5 320 initiatives were identified).
- Screening calls (self-reference and lockstep model assessment) to capture social change according with the criteria: mission, impact, local empowerment and social inclusion, innovation, inspiration, sustainability, replication and scalability (3 724 initiatives).
- Surveying the selected initiatives to determine which were effectively leading social innovation (803 initiatives).
- Validation of the initiatives which presented the highest impact and potential for scaling up (result: 160 initiatives).

Portugal produced several outputs, including a booklet and an interactive map to better disseminate the information. Lessons learned included:

- Lack of critical thinking and ambiguity around concepts.
- Lack of testing and prototyping support.
- Lack of access to investment for scaling-up.
- Lack of local business support organisations, including a network of local incubators and accelerators.
- Strong dependence on public funding.
- Heavy bureaucratic processes.
- Mainstream players preferred (at the time) a conservative approach.
- The need to support human capital needs (coaching, personal development).
- The need to give visibility to high-potential initiatives and good practices.

In terms of running a mapping exercise, building shared ownership, taking a mixed-method approach is most likely to capture the fullest picture.

- Involving target groups from the outset and throughout increased the effectiveness of the projects. Bridging any gaps between local, regional and national actors is important to cultivate a healthy ecosystem.
- Using survey methodology was a preferred method across participants to map stakeholders. In Slovakia, the survey reached out to a wide range of actors, from public administration to social entrepreneurs and NGOs, and focused on how target groups were involved, which fields needed social innovations most, how social innovations were identified, and whether any issues were encountered.
- Other participants stated that mixing methodologies (quantitative and qualitative) helped to better map needs and gaps of the ecosystem. It also further bolstered co-creation of social innovation projects.

We concluded with an image of the competence centres as catalysts of social innovation within their respective ecosystems. Catalysts creating linkages and opportunities for the actors to meet and cooperate to enhance their capacity to act on societal challenges.

Next steps

- Study on ESF-funded Community-led Local Development (CLLD) and factsheets about the competence centre projects will be published on [the ESF+ website](#). CoP members will receive a notification in due course.
- The social innovation database, tested by the CoP members in July, will be launched later in 2021.
- Participants raised the need for more regular meetings between competence centres to share methods, good practices and possibilities for cross-consortia learning.
- The next CoP meeting is planned for February 2022 focusing on how to provide support on scaling-up social innovations and how to set up and successfully implement a competence centre.



**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!](#)