



Summary Report

ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform

Community of Practice on Social Innovation

Third plenary meeting

1-2 February 2022, online

Risto Raivio (European Commission) opened the plenary meeting¹ by providing an update on the initiative European Social Fund (ESF) Social Innovation+. The initiative supports transnational cooperation in order to facilitate transfer and scaling-up of social innovations. It therefore complements the social innovation focussed provision within the two strands of the ESF+:

- The shared management strand whereby member states can use their ESF+ resources to support the creation of new social innovations and to scale-up social innovations that have been tested and proven to be successful.
- The previous European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) has become a strand within the ESF+ and will also include a specific provision for social experimentation at a small scale to be replicated at a larger scale if successful.

The ESF Social Innovation+ will be implemented at European Union (EU) level under so called indirect management with a particular focus on the transfer and scaling of social innovation. The future National Competence Centres for Social Innovation will be parts of the European social innovation ecosystem and have an important role in catalysing social innovation within the Member States.

Figure 1. ESF Social Innovation+ initiative



Source: European Commission

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.

- The Lithuanian ESF agency (ESFA) will be the entrusted entity for the ESF Social Innovation+ and act as the Dedicated Secretariat to establish a system of drawing stakeholders and experts in the field of social innovation.
- The Advisory Board will have a multi-stakeholder structure and provide strategic guidance.
- There will be two work streams – the grants scheme that will have approximately EUR 150 million of funding available and the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation who will organise transnational cooperation and become a knowledge hub of social innovation. It will draw from the work of the national competence centres and seek synergies with various EU programmes and funds (Horizon Europe, Erasmus, ERDF, etc.).
- Member states, social innovation stakeholders and social partners will be consulted on the thematic priorities for the whole ESF Social Innovation+ initiative.

The future National and European Competence Centres for Social Innovation have complementary roles:

Box 1. Roles of National Competence Centres and European Competence Centre for Social Innovation

National Competence Centres	European Competence Centre
<p>Capacity-building, stocktaking, networking and advocacy in the member state</p> <p>Promotion of the use of EU programmes and funds</p> <p>Actively connected to transnational cooperation at EU level</p>	<p>EU-level capacity building, stocktaking, and networking</p> <p>Mutual learning between member states and between projects funded by the ESF Social Innovation+</p> <p>Mobilising knowledge from national level and from international research</p> <p>Synergies between different EU programmes and initiatives</p>

Laura Mangeng (European Commission) presented the state of play of the Social Innovation Database, which the European Commission is launching at the end of the first quarter of 2022. The aim of the Database is to showcase social innovation projects and promote the transfer and scaling-up of social innovation.

Social innovation in ESF+ Programmes

In this session, managing authorities discussed progress in programming social innovation priorities in their ESF+ Programmes – From European vision to national plans.

Social innovation in Portugal within ESF+

Portugal Social Innovation was the most comprehensive initiative in the previous programming period (2014-2020) that explicitly supported social innovation and social entrepreneurship initiatives. Portugal created four instruments, aligned with the life cycle of a social innovation project, to meet the financing needs of social innovation promoters with an active involvement of private and public investors in the process as partners. From the objective point of view these social innovation and social entrepreneurship initiatives may have a preventive or corrective profile, depending on whether they are intended to prevent a social problem or combat/address an existing one. In the current programming period (2021-2027), Portugal Social Innovation will aim to become a national competence centre for social innovation. It will continue to boost alignment between the national social innovation ecosystem and public policy innovation goals, encourage impact philanthropy, and enhance the role of impact assessment.

Simplified cost options (SCOs) which were tested in one of the last open calls launched during the previous period are a strong recommendation for the programming period ahead. Portugal is considering also to expand its number of financing instruments, all of them requesting for measurable and verifiable indicators and targets related with the expected social impact. Such information should be contractually agreed between the Managing Authority and the entities promoting the projects which will serve as a criteria throughout the execution compliance assessment. Moreover, Portugal will improve a portal created in 2017 (One Value) that contains information on public investment in some of the priority social issue areas. There are 18 social innovation incubators in the country managed in partnership with municipalities to mobilise investment and act as multipliers of social innovation. The partnership agreement with the Commission has not yet been signed but there is an available proposal for the financing instruments to promote social innovation.

Social innovation in different 2021-2027 ESF programmes in Germany

In the current programming period (2021-2027), Germany has one ESF+ programme at federal level and 16 programmes in each of the German Länder, which are yet to be adopted. Coordination of funding is an issue between the different levels (state and Länder), particularly in avoiding competition between programmes, and the Commission encourages the coherence of funding in order to prevent overlaps.

Eight of the 17 German ESF+ programmes have a dedicated priority on social innovation (one at federal level and seven at Länder level). Of these eight programmes, five have selected the specific objective on active inclusion, two have selected access to employment, two have selected equal access to education, and one programme each has selected life-long learning and social services and systems.

Testing is at the core of German social innovation which implies the right to fail. Hence, indicators will have to be carefully selected because pressure to innovate can become counterproductive. Additionally, Germany will use community-led local development and bottom-up approaches in some of its priorities on social innovation. Nine German ESF+ programmes do not have a dedicated priority but will carry out related activities in other priorities.

Beyond innovation: scaling-up / replicating / scaling across

In this session, participants discussed different approaches used to scale-up social innovation, based on examples from Ireland and Spain.

Lessons on scaling-up social innovation within the European Social Catalyst Fund

The European Social Catalyst Fund (ESCF) has been established and is co-funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, the Genio Trust, the Robert Bosch Stiftung and the King Baudouin Foundation. The ESCF was established to: (i) find "proven" innovations to overcome or reduce societal challenges; (ii) provide funding and capacity-building to develop plans to scale within and across EU Member States; (iii) stimulate public/private collaborations to scale; and (iv) share learning.

In its efforts to identify tried and tested social innovations, ESCF received 120 applications across 22 countries. The main focus areas of the applications included poverty and marginalisation, disability, ageing, employment and job creating, energy poverty and digital inclusion. Out of the 120 applications, seven innovations which showed significant potential for impact were selected for scaling-up. EUR 600 000 was awarded to develop scaling-up plans for 15 countries, as illustrated on Figure 2. The plans are now being implemented.

A key lesson from the ESCF is that there are many 'proven' social innovations within the EU Member States that are scalable. However, scale-up of social innovation does not happen automatically, it requires planning and resources. Regarding public and private funding, the consortia that developed the scaling plans were very creative in developing

different public/private funding arrangements. Private funding can play a critical role at the early stages while public funding is essential for sustaining and scaling impact at large to tackle complex problems. Knowing how to engage stakeholders based on understanding the particular cultural and operational environment and learning about existing efforts to respond to the relevant social challenge are also critical for success. Replication of innovations without any adaptation rarely happens. It is important to understand the essential elements of the innovation that contributes to success and to retain these while bringing innovations to new areas to be able to predict outcomes with some confidence. Finally, there is room for mutual learning within and across countries as this can accelerate the pace of scaling significantly.

Further details about the scaling-up plans, as well as other relevant information are available on the ESCF's website.

Figure 2. Countries where scaling plans have been developed



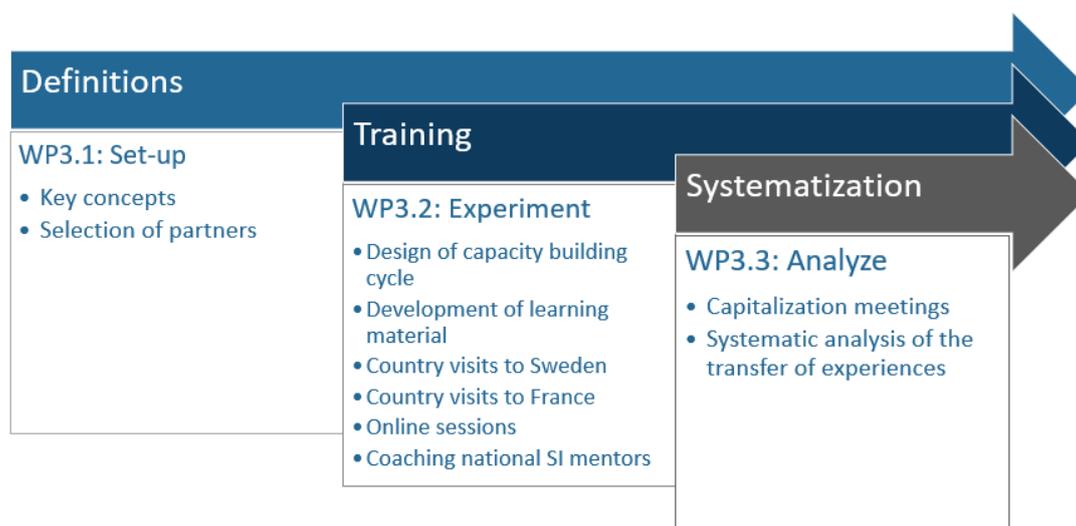
Source: European Social Catalyst Fund

Spotlight on scaling-up social innovation in Spain

The Spanish Ministry of Social Rights is part of the BuiCaSuS consortium (Building Capacity for a Sustainable Society) along with France, Latvia and Sweden. The main work packages of the project are related to mapping, upscaling, knowledge hub, and institutionalising the competence centre.

Together with its partners, Spain aims to scale-up deinstitutionalisation projects that are led by government and delivered by established NGOs. The Spanish Recovery and Resilience Plan entails different long-term care services addressing the aging population and aims to promote innovation in social services. Furthermore, the recovery plan requires the development of projects with a specific design on social innovation and upscaling. EUR 160 million are available over the next three years for developing pilot projects in this area. With its expertise in supporting social enterprises to scale up, Avise (France) is going to support the process in Spain, adapting its advice to a different institutional context.

Figure 4: Approach to scaling up deinstitutionalisation projects in Spain

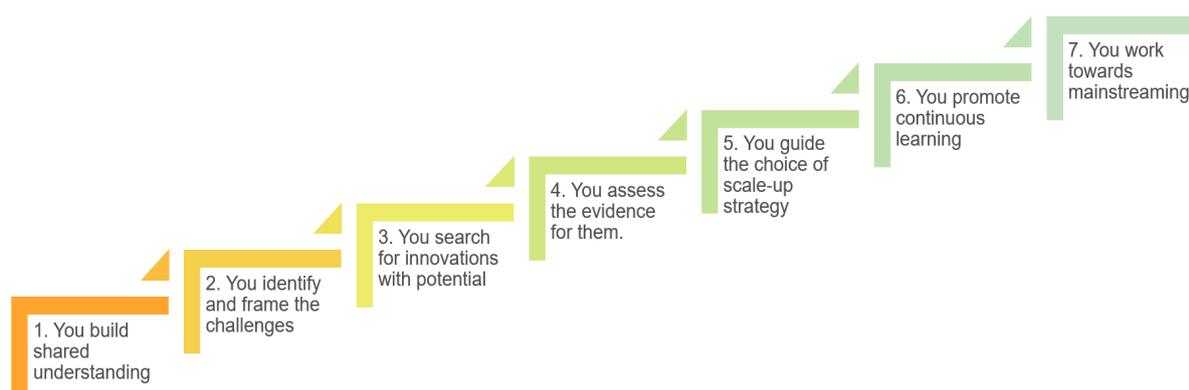


Source: BuiCaSuS, Spain

Spotlight on the Scaling-up social innovation Toolkit

In this session, thematic expert Stephen J. Barnett presented the forthcoming toolkit on scaling-up social innovation, which recommends seven strategic steps that managing authorities and intermediate bodies can take to support proven social innovations to be scale-up through ESF and beyond.

Figure 6. The scale-up staircase: seven strategic steps and their tools



Source: Toolkit on scaling-up social innovation. Seven steps for using ESF+

Moreover, in this session Dr. Hayley Trowbridge presented *Learning As You Scale*, a guide for using data and insights to navigate scaling and complex system change, commissioned by Genio in the context of the European Social Catalyst Fund. The guide aims to support people to embed a disposition to learn as they scale in their social innovation. It is designed specifically for scaling in complex change environments that are often addressing 'wicked' social problems and has a keen focus on involving the people at the heart of social innovations (i.e., the beneficiaries) in the scaling and learning process.

National competence centres for social innovation

The Community of Practice members presented three models for national competence centres for social innovation, namely from Sweden, Greece and France.

Spotlight on the national competence centre model in Sweden

As Figure 7. indicates, Sweden's key social innovation priority in the ESF+ revolves around supporting social innovation and social experiment measures as well as the development

of innovative strategies. Traditionally, Sweden has been placing a strong emphasis on the labour market and combining this with another thematic focus on economic vulnerability within the objective of active inclusion, opens up a wide range of possibilities within the ESF+.

Sweden is currently in the process of finalising its National Action Plan, which has four key topics to address: 1) social sustainability, 2) labour market in transition, 3) skills development and lifelong learning, and 3) green transition. In aiming to build capacity and connect its priorities with the competence centre, Sweden acknowledges the importance of joint efforts and exchanging experiences in a variety of fields. In their ESF+ proposal, they also applied to install a National Contact Point to support applicants.

Figure 7. Sweden’s social innovation priorities in the ESF+



Source: Forum for Social Innovation Sweden

The Forum for Social Innovation Sweden (FFSIS) is a national knowledge and collaboration platform, functioning as the CCSI for Sweden. As part of the BuiCaSuS consortium, FFSIS are among other things working on describing best practices to support social innovation, such as funding initiatives, tools to support the business promoting system actors and different ways to organize support to social innovation. These practices will be shared and discussed in national and international cross-sectorial meetings. The practices and learnings from the meetings will be used when building the national competence centre. An ambition is to connect the social innovation logic to the ESF logic, the “know how” of doing social innovation to the experience and knowledge available in the ESF.

Spotlight on the national competence centre model in Greece

Greece is part of the SEED project, led by Italy and including Romania and Slovenia. The mapping of social innovation in each country was the first work package that consortium partners started to work on. This began with the national definition of social innovation, which – being a new concept – is difficult to do in Greece, where the term ‘social economy’ is more familiar. Thus, Greek partners identified the need to establish a common understanding of social innovation in the country, and set the alignment of legal references to social innovation with relevant policies as one of the goals for their future Competence Centre.

The next step was to separate the community-led cases of social innovation, which are prevalent in each country – and especially in Greece, where there is a wide range of active small organisations – from the mapping of government-led initiatives. Since finding a systematic way to map was a challenge in Greece, nearly 100 cases of community-led and 32 government-led cases of social innovation practices were handpicked in the study. The mapping notes the category of supporting organisations, because partners realised there were a large number of intermediaries.

The report produced from the mapping exercise will serve as an important basis for upcoming reflections on designing Greece’s competence centre model.

Next steps

The valuable feedback of the participants provided on the **Scaling-up social innovation Toolkit** during the breakout group discussions of the third plenary meeting of the CoP on Social Innovation will be documented in a detailed manner. These observations will be used to prepare the final version of the Toolkit due in May 2022.

Upcoming joined **workshop on Simplified Cost Options in social innovation**, planned for **5 May 2022**, bringing together members of the Community of Practice (CoP) on Social Innovation as well as of the CoP on Results-based Management.

Late February an Expression of interests will be launched for those interested in signing up for the above workshop.

4th Plenary meeting of CoP on Social Innovation will take place on **28-29 April 2022**, focusing on the design, functions, funding and governance of the planned competence centres on social innovation.

The **final conference of the ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform** will be organised between **31 May – 1 June 2022**. The European Commission will introduce the new setting to support transnational cooperation between 2021-2027.

Other resources:

- The European Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care: [a resource on deinstitutionalisation with EU funds](#)
- [Information](#) on capacity building events on the transition from institutional to community-based care and independent living
- [The Foresight webinars](#) by Forum for Social Innovation Sweden
- The work of EURO CITIES on [the role of municipalities in supporting social innovation](#)
- [Simplified Cost Options – A practitioners' manual](#) | European Social Fund Plus