

Madrid Declaration for Stronger Recognition and Funding of Social Innovation in the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034

A joint call endorsed by National Competence Centres for Social Innovation and ecosystem actors across Europe

Preamble

We, the undersigned National Competence Centres for Social Innovation and supporting organisations from across Europe, issue this declaration as a common call for stronger recognition, funding and integration of social innovation in the future EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034. This initiative builds on cooperation efforts among 17 National Competence Centres and 67 other ecosystem actors active in 19 European countries and reflects a growing shared commitment to ensure that social innovation is treated as a practical and necessary capability for delivering EU priorities more effectively, and it is integrated accordingly within the MFF mechanism.

This declaration is presented at the National Competence Centres Mutual Learning Event “Social Innovation Portfolios in Practice: Building Advocacy for Systemic Change”, organised in Madrid on 4–5 May 2026 and it builds on a common vision shared by National Competence Centres, EaSI National Contact Points, public authorities, managing authorities and intermediate bodies, NGOs, research institutions, networks, support platforms and other ecosystem actors engaged in advancing social innovation in practice and policy in: **Austria; Belgium; Croatia; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Ireland; Italy; Netherlands; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Slovakia; Slovenia, Spain**

The undersigned organisations 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.

Across Europe, social innovation is already helping public authorities, civil society, social economy actors and support organisations respond to complex societal challenges that conventional instruments and standard delivery models do not adequately resolve. Yet within the current MFF proposal, social innovation remains only partially visible, despite its relevance for employment, inclusion, skills, territorial cohesion, resilience, competitiveness and the green and digital transitions. This declaration therefore calls for a more coherent and ambitious recognition of social innovation as a practical implementation capability within the next MFF and its future delivery architecture.

Our common calls for the next MFF

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.

Endorsed by the following organisations and institutions

National Competence Centres for Social Innovation

**Romanian
Competence Center
for Social Innovation**

Romania

*Romanian Competence Center for
Social Innovation*



Greece

SED Consultants



Denmark

Danish Social Innovation Academy



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Portugal Social Innovation



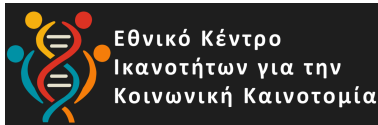
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AVISE



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Republic*



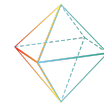
Greece

Greek NCC for SI



Slovenia

*Slovenian Competence Center
for Social innovation*



**Kompetenzzentrum
für Soziale Innovationen
Deutschland**

Germany

*National Competence Center for
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Hungarian NCC for SI



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Academic and research institutions



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West University of Timisoara



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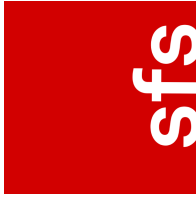
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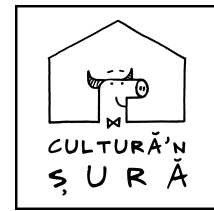
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