Blueprint for a Strategy and Action Plan for

Social Innovation in Ireland

June 2023

Blueprint for Social Innovation in Ireland

Authors

Content

Glossary

C&V organisations	Community and Voluntary organisations
DETE	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DoH	Department of Health
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
EaSI	European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation
ECCSI	European Competence Centre for Social Innovation
FUSE	Facilitating United approaches to Social Innovation in Europe
ESF+	European Social Fund +
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
NCCSI	National Competence Centre for Social Innovation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
UN	United Nations

1. Introduction

Social innovation has been taken to the forefront of European practice, research and policy discourse as a mechanism generating social, environmental, and economic value when addressing complex challenges that our societies face - such as climate change, social exclusion, ageing society, depopulation of rural areas and digitalisation.

According to the European Commission (EC)[1], *"social innovation refers to 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"*.

In the framework of an EC call for supporting the development of social innovation across Europe, Rethink Ireland and Genio have led the co-development of this joint Blueprint undertaken by engaging in an inclusive and participatory approach key Irish stakeholders, including representatives from public sector, private sector, civil society, and academia. The Blueprint puts forward proposals and recommendations aimed at supporting the further development of social innovation in Ireland for consideration by the Government as part of a national strategy and action plan for social innovation.

The Blueprint is proposing a four-year framework, 2023-2027, and will build capacities of key social innovation players across government, academia, industry, and civil society, to strengthen and enhance their capacity to act, and encourage cross-sectoral experimentalism and new and collaborative ways of working.

Based on the learnings from other EU countries, and the European Commission's[2] supports to the establishment of a network of national competence centres for social innovation across Member State (MS), a key recommendation included in the Blueprint is the establishment of a National Competence Centre for Social Innovation (NCCSI) in Ireland to catalyse and drive the development of the social innovation sector and a key body of engagement with the European National Competence Centre for Social Innovation (now up and running and located in Lithuania). The Irish NCCSI is identified as the responsible organism for the implementation of a significant number of the actions included in the Blueprint.

---

[1] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1057&from=EN
[2] In 2022 the Commission established a European Competence Centre for Social Innovation (ECCSI), a platform for transnational cooperation, mutual learning and to support the national competence centres.

2. Background and Methodology

European Commission Call for Competences Centres for Social Innovation

In 2020, the EC announced a call for proposals for 'Competence centres for social innovation', funded in part by the European Social Fund - ESF, and European Programme for Employment and Social Innovation – EaSI[3]. Six consortia were selected to establish national competence centres for social innovation and drive social innovation locally, regionally, nationally, and transnationally. This EC Call had four key objectives:

- Capacity building: to build capacities of key social innovation stakeholders, notably ESF Managing Authorities, funders and donors, intermediaries, social innovation initiatives and practitioners alike. This is to be pursued, by providing professional support services ranging from design and development to assessment, upscaling and mainstreaming of social innovations through effective public policies and actions, creating a conducive environment for social innovation in a Member State.
- Transnational transfer of knowledge: to transfer know-how and tools for the support to social innovation from ESF Managing Authorities, social innovation competence centres and social innovation stakeholders with a long-standing and deep experience, to organisations in Member States with a shorter and less developed or less comprehensive experience and competence in this field. Establishing a mentoring relationship between competence centres of both types of Member States will be instrumental in this respect.
- Creation of synergies: to create further synergies between the EaSI Programme and the ESF, especially in view of designing, supporting, monitoring, and mainstreaming innovative actions that could be extended, enlarged and/or replicated using ESF+ funding in subsequent years.
- Networking: to network and cooperate with other selected competence centres, using mutual learning as well as by jointly developing, assessing, and optimising suitable tools and methods, and collecting and disseminating inspiring examples, models and practices.

FUSE - European consortium led by Ireland

Facilitating United approaches to Social Innovation across Europe (FUSE[4]) is one of the six consortia in Europe selected to set up national competence centres to cultivate networks, build capacities and synergies, spotlight efficiencies and develop tools and methods that will contribute to growing social innovation within and across countries. This work will also help ESF+ Managing Authorities in programming and implementing actions with ESF+ funds[5]. FUSE brings together national social innovation organisations in Ireland, Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Portugal. Between 2021-2023 the FUSE consortium aimed to cultivate networks, build capacities and synergies, spotlight efficiencies and developed tools and methods that will contribute to

---

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/competence-centres-social-innovation
[4] https://www.fuseproject.eu/
[5] https://ec.europa.eu/european-social-fund-plus/en/competence-centres-social-innovation

growing social innovation across the four countries and should also be helpful to other EU countries. Rethink Ireland and Genio were endorsed by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) to represent Ireland in the FUSE consortium. Rethink Ireland is the lead partner for the consortium.

Additional support was also provided to the FUSE Consortium through the establishment of a Consortium Advisory Committee (CAC) and a Consortium Executive Committee (CEC). The CAC provided technical advice to the project for the implementation of the different components across work packages. Members were top representatives of the social innovation ecosystem of each of the Member States of the consortium (philanthropists, academia, public authorities, policy makers, social entrepreneurs), (see Appendix 1). The CEC acted as the Consortium's strategic management body coordinating and overseeing the overall work of the project. Membership included one representative from each partner organisation, (see Appendix 2).

CoRá[6] is the Irish dimension of FUSE. Key objectives of CoRá are the following:

1. Map Ireland's social innovation ecosystem support structures
2. Raise awareness, build capacity & skills of key social innovation players
3. Develop a joint blueprint for a strategy and action plan for the development of social innovation
4. Support the establishment and development of a National Competence Centre for Social Innovation in Ireland

Key features of Social Innovation and its Ecosystem in Ireland

The research study commissioned by CoRá for mapping of the support structures for Social Innovation in Ireland[7], showed that social innovation and its ecosystem in Ireland presents some key features that are important to consider for this Blueprint. First, social innovation is intrinsically linked with **novelty and change**. These new ideas, processes, relationships, solutions (services, products) **aim to address diverse social, environmental, and societal challenges** and can be **disruptive,** something radically new, but also **incremental,** something already existing applied to a different target group, a new geographical territory and/or scaled to a wider population or territory. Social innovation can (and usually does) flourish at the local and community level, however, the relevance for social innovation is to address societal challenges and deliver **systemic and systems change.**

Secondly, social innovations flourish and develop from **collective action** rather than from individual endeavours. In this environment, social innovation usually entails **multi-stakeholders' collaboration/cooperation across different sectors, including**

---

[6] https://www.coraireland.ie/
[7] A full version of the report from this research study can be found at:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/62043a88799ca1476cfee09b/t/6269583a65046b4f5e33b5d4/1651071040355/Mapping+Support+Structure+for+Social+Innovation+in+Ireland_Final_reviewed+%281%29.pdf

the engagement of those directly affected by the challenges addressed, which are associated with the development of respectful and trustful relationships among these.

Thirdly, a key aspect for social innovation is the development of **assessment-measurement methods, tools and indicators** that can provide evidence about the contribution (impact) of social innovation. These methods, tools and indicators need to capture the above mentioned features of social innovation.

Besides these features of social innovation, the **Irish social innovation ecosystem** is characterised by **social innovations** developed by a wide range of **agents**, including **social enterprises/entrepreneurs, Community and Voluntary (C&V) organisations, social movements, public institutions, and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) which create social impact through specific characteristics (purpose-driven business/ organisations)**. Social innovations in Ireland can be found within a wide range of fields such as eldercare services, agriculture, employment, children with special educational needs, community development, gender equality/empowerment, ethnic minorities, migrants, physical and mental well-being, rural development or recycling. Irish social innovations are also diverse in their stage of development, from initiatives at early-start up stages to those that have been scaled nation-wide. Social innovations can be found across the whole country. Due to the lack of official and comprehensive statistics on social innovation organisations/initiatives within Ireland it is not possible to estimate the number of social innovation organisations across the country and their specific characteristics.

These social innovations do not occur in a vacuum, they have been developed through the interactions of different actors situated in specific geographical, environmental, socio-economic, and institutional contexts. The emergence, development, consolidation, and scaling of social innovation initiatives is enhanced and/or hindered by 'ecosystems' which act as the framework for social innovation. The social innovation ecosystem in Ireland presents diverse supports to social innovative organisations in terms of funding, networking, mentoring, and training programmes. These supports come from **public bodies (public sector)** with competencies in the development of policies, strategies and programmes related to social innovation. These public bodies include Government Departments, Local Authorities and State Agencies. Furthermore, support to social innovation is provided by **intermediary organisations and networks** (usually from the civil society), **research and higher education institutions (academia)** and (social) **finance intermediaries** (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Overview of social innovation ecosystem in Ireland[8]

Despite these supports, the **social innovation ecosystem in Ireland is still in a nascent stage with great scope for improvement**, especially in terms of the development of more structured, cohesive, and strategic mechanisms that can enable social innovation in its different stages of development, from early-stages to consolidation and scaling. Within the social innovation ecosystem, a fundamental pillar is the development of public policies, strategies, and programmes that support social innovation.

From the complexity of the challenges that Ireland currently faces, the focus on social innovation in EU policy and programmes, the learnings gained through exchanges with other consortium members of the EU FUSE project, and the findings from the research study on mapping social innovation support structures in Ireland, it is evident that a national strategy that supports, develops, and grows social innovation is required.

The co-development of this joint Blueprint has been undertaken by engaging key Irish stakeholders, in an inclusive and participatory approach including representatives from public sector, private sector, civil society, and academia.

Methodology: Evidence-based, Bottom-up, Multi-stakeholder and Iterative Approach

The development of this Blueprint for Social Innovation in Ireland has followed two main stages. In the first instance, the above mentioned research study on mapping support structures for social innovation in Ireland commissioned by CoRá was conducted. The research was developed between September 2021 and February 2022 and included desk research about the state of social innovation in Ireland; a survey, completed by 62 social innovative organisations and interviews, with 19 Irish experts on

---

[8] The logos included within the Figure do not represent an exhaustive list of organisations/institutions supporting social innovation in Ireland

social innovation from different sectors, including public, (for-profit) business, academia, and civil society. The findings from the research were presented and discussed in a workshop with a multi-stakeholder group which forms the National Advisory Consultative Group for Social Innovation in Ireland (see Appendix 3) and with a Steering Group formed by representatives from the DRCD; the DFHERIS; Rethink Ireland and Genio (see Appendix 4)[9]. Overall findings from the four countries were also presented to the Consortium Advisory Committee and the Consortium Executive Committee.

The second stage towards the development of this Blueprint consists of four (3-4 hours) workshops with stakeholders/representatives of the Irish social innovation ecosystem – which comprise the above-mentioned multi-stakeholder National Advisory Consultative Group for Social Innovation in Ireland. In the two initial workshops the findings from the above mentioned research have been used to initiate/stimulate conversations about 'defining social innovation', 'criteria/ metrics for the assessment & measurement of impact of social innovation', 'capacity building' and 'bridging gaps between different stakeholders and sectors'. In a third workshop a first full draft of this Blueprint was discussed with the Advisory Group. In the fourth workshop the role of the forthcoming National Competence Centre for Social Innovation in Ireland was discussed. The feedback from stakeholders represents a significant source of information that has informed this Blueprint. In addition, within this second stage, an online forum was established for eliciting feedback on the draft versions of this Blueprint and to discuss relevant themes concerning social innovation. These online discussions have also been considered as feedback for developing this Blueprint.

In summary, this Blueprint has been developed following a research evidence-based, bottom-up, multi-stakeholder and iterative methodological approach.

The Blueprint is proposing a four-year framework, 2023-2027, and will build capacities of key social innovation players across government, academia, industry, and civil society, to strengthen and enhance their capacity to act, and encourage cross-sectoral experimentalism and new and collaborative ways of working. The Blueprint puts forward proposals and recommendations aimed at supporting the growth of social innovation in Ireland for consideration by the Government as part of a national strategy and action plan for social innovation.

---

[9]The final report of this research is available at:
https://www.fuseproject.eu/news-events/the-cor-project-is-mapping-the-ecosystem-of-social-innovation-in-ireland

3. Strategic Axes and Actions of Ireland's Social Innovation Blueprint

Based on the key features of social innovation and its ecosystem in Ireland, the evidence presented by research and feedback from stakeholders, this Blueprint for Social Innovation in Ireland presents four strategic axes: Building a Common Understanding and Raising Awareness; Institutional & Policy framework; Funding & Investment and Social Impact Assessment.

Within each of the strategic axes, specific actions are developed, indicating the rationale, details, and main agents for their implementation, priority, and time frame.

A key action - the establishment of a National Competence Centre for Social Innovation

There are different views about the future of a NCCSI and how the concept might be administered or managed. Nevertheless, as demonstrated by some EU examples (Portugal and France), it is essential to have a central unit for implementing social innovation public policy. These units play a key role in capacity building, networking, and knowledge sharing on both national and European level.

NCCSI can encourage public-private partnerships and involves a spectrum of actors in their work, from public authorities, social innovation experts, and social innovators/social enterprises. National competence centres can share knowledge and communicate the concept of social innovation to a broader audience, hence playing a critical role as ecosystem builders on the national level.

The Irish NCCSI is identified as the responsible organism for the implementation of a significant number of the actions included in the Blueprint. The Irish NCCSI can catalyse and drive the development of the social innovation sector and be the key body of engagement with the European National Competence Centre for Social Innovation (now up and running and located in Lithuania). The NCCSI could take the form of a unit within the Government department or through the endorsement of an intermediary/NGO. In anycase, the Irish Government will need to identify and endorse an Irish representative to interact with the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation.

3.1 Building a Common Understanding and Raising Awareness

The first strategic axis consists of building a common understanding and raising awareness of social innovation in Ireland. Three specific actions are proposed for this aim:

Action 1. Establish an inclusive working definition of social innovation for Ireland

A key element for building a common understanding and raising awareness of social innovation is establishing a working definition that sets parameters for social innovations. Our recommendation is that this definition must be inclusive,

acknowledging the diverse aims, collective and cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder nature of social innovations in Ireland. The definition should also align with the principles established by the European Commission regarding social innovation.

This action can be coordinated by the forthcoming National Competence Centre for Social Innovation (NCCSI), see section 4.2. Inputs from the multi-stakeholder National Advisory Consultative Group for Social Innovation and from the central Government Departments must be considered. The priority of this action is high, thus we recommend this action to be developed in Year 1, as it sets a significant common ground for the development of other actions within this Blueprint.

Action 2. Raising awareness of social innovation to different audiences

Raising awareness, demystifying and clarifying the terminology, understanding and key features, around social innovation to the general public but also to individuals working within current and potential support structures for social innovation in Ireland. In addition, increasing understanding (awareness) of the cross-sectoral and hybrid features of social innovation is suggested as a way for greater recognition of blended outcomes.

A tailor-made communication and dissemination strategy targeting different audiences is recommended. Identified target audiences include the general public, C&V organisations, social enterprises, private for-profit business (SMEs and multinationals), financial intermediaries (social lenders, banks, impact investors), philanthropists and public institutions (Government Departments, Local Authorities). Developing and/or reinforcing educational programmes about social innovation at primary, secondary and tertiary education levels represent a key aspect to enhance social innovation, especially with a long-term perspective.

Ambassadors for social innovation should be identified in each sector to promote the awareness of social innovation within different stakeholders. The priority of this action is high to medium, thus we recommend this action to be developed in Years 1, 2, 3 and 4. This action can have a significant ripple effect for social innovation.

Action 3. Specialised social innovation information platform and forum

A specialised social innovation platform (repository) for the exchange of information among stakeholders can boost social innovation. There already exists a wealth of information on social innovation that is mainly dispersed, and its access depends highly on individual personal connections. This action aims to coordinate and make easily accessible to social innovators and other stakeholders the available and forthcoming information on different themes related to social innovation, e.g., international best practices, legal and policy frameworks, funding opportunities, case studies, social impact tools, etc. This platform (repository) would link to the Social Innovation Database recently developed by the European Commission, which contains inspirational examples of social innovation, with the aim of promoting the transfer and scaling-up of social innovation across Europe[10].

---

[10] ESF+ Social Innovation Database

Complementarily, a moderated and thematically organised online social innovation forum is recommended as a way for social innovative agents to exchange knowledge, ideas, expertise, doubts, and concerns. This ongoing online forum can have a yearly face-to-face event (e.g., Social Innovation Summit/Forum).

The NCCSI can oversee, coordinate, and update the repository of information on social innovation. The NCCSI can implement and moderate the online forum and organise in conjunction with stakeholders the face-to-face yearly summit. We recommend this action to be developed in Years 2 and 4. The action is complementary and will generate a positive feedback loop with Action 2.

Table 1. Strategic Axis Building a Common Understanding and Raising Awareness. Actions.

Action (Recommendation)	Who	Priority
Establish an inclusive working definition of social innovation for Ireland.	DRCD and Central Government Departments NCCSI (coordination) Advisory Consultative Group for Social Innovation (to be established)	Year 1
Raise awareness to different audiences	DRCD and Central Government Departments (funding), mainly through intermediary organisations and ambassadors	Years 1-4
Develop a specialised social innovation information platform and forum	NCCSI	Years 2-4

3.2 Institutional & Policy framework

The second strategic axis refers to the institutional and policy framework of social innovation in Ireland. Three specific actions are proposed for this aim:

Action 4. Develop a National Competence Centre for Social Innovation

The development of an autonomous National Competence Centre for Social Innovation (NCCSI) can represent a significant milestone for enhancing the institutional framework of social innovation in Ireland. International experiences such as the establishment of 'Portugal Inovaçao Social' (Portugal Social Innovation) and France NCCSI support this. In this regard, the European Commission aims to establish in each EU country a NCCSI.

The role and functions of Ireland's NCCSI (see Box 1) will be delivered across the four Axes developed within this Blueprint (Building a Common Understanding and Raising

Awareness; Institutional & Policy framework; Funding & Investment and Social Impact Assessment).

Box 1. Main role and functions of proposed Ireland's NCCSI

The role and main functions of the NCCSI include the following:
- act as a coordination unit for social innovation in Ireland
- link different kinds of stakeholders, helping them to find synergies, and pool together their expertise and develop joint promotional work
- enhance and coordinate a multi-scale network (regional, local) of social innovation hubs
- raise awareness of social innovation across stakeholders and the general public
- provide capacity building and training to stakeholders, including government departments, depending on their needs
- help stakeholders to make good use of available EU funding (ESF+ and other EU funds and programmes) and steer other public and private funders towards social innovation
- help ESF+ Managing Authorities in programming and implementing actions with ESF+ funds (NCCSI as ESF+ Intermediate body)
- help social innovation stakeholders to connect transnationally through exchange and cooperate with their peers across the EU
- help inform the work of the European Competence Centre for Social Innovation (ECCSI)[11]
- coordinate the development of a common framework to measure social impact across social innovations

The establishment of the NCCSI can derive from co-funding from EU ESF+ and/or EaSI with national funds. Funding for the NCCSI will (ideally) be in the form of a public-private partnership/arrangement. The NCCSI must follow a multi-stakeholder governance approach, with representation from social innovation stakeholders from the public sector, civil society (community), business sector and academia. We recommend developing this action in Year 1. It is important to note that this NCCSI is identified as the responsible organism for the implementation of some of the actions of this Blueprint. The NCCSI could take the form of a unit within the Government department or through the endorsement of an intermediary/NGO.

Action 5. Enhance Cross-Departmental Collaborations

The cross-sectoral and hybrid features of social innovation are often mismatched with usual silo working cultures and structures from government departments and sectoral perspectives from stakeholders. Enhancing cross-departmental collaboration is key for enabling social innovations. These cross-departmental collaborations will permeate in collaborations of state agencies and stakeholders from different sectors. The

---

[11] https://www.esf.lt/en/activities/esf-social-innovation-initiative/1085opean social fund agency

development of cross-departmental programmes related to social innovation, the regular identification of departments' strategic elements that can be delivered collaboratively following social innovation processes, and the utilisation of social innovation ambassadors within different departments can represent specific means of implementing this action.

This action could be led by the DRCD, in conjunction with other central government departments, and with an independent body such as the NCCSI. We recommend this action to be developed from Year 1.

Action 6. Strategy/Policy on Social Innovation

The development and implementation of a National Strategy/Policy on Social Innovation can represent a significant milestone for social innovation in Ireland. Establishing a policy framework is key for harnessing social innovation occurring across Ireland and to develop supports that address the real needs of the Irish social innovation ecosystem, including agents and current support structures. This framework for the development of social innovation needs to align with EU policy/strategies on social innovation to harness resources and expertise from the international level.

Furthermore, the strategy/policy should not aim to be a silo document, but it should rather reinforce the cross-sectoral aim and nature of social innovation. Hence, it should align and feed into other Government Policies and Strategies; including, but not limited to, 'Making Innovation Real: A strategy for Embedding innovation in the Irish Public Service'; 'Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy'; 'Our Rural Future Rural Development Policy' and the 'National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland'.

The implementation of this action can be led by the DRCD. We recommend this action to be developed in Years 1-3. This action can have a significant ripple effect.

Table 2. Strategic Axis Institutional & Policy Framework. Actions

Action (Recommendation)	Who	Priority
Develop a National Competence Centre for Social Innovation	EC DRCD and Central Government Departments Cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholders	Year 1
Enhance cross-Departmental Collaborations	DRCD and Central Government Departments	Year 1
Strategy/Policy Social Innovation	DRCD and Central Government Departments	Years 1-3

3.3 Funding & Investment

The third strategic axis refers to funding and investment for social innovation in Ireland. Three specific actions are proposed for this aim:

Action 7. Develop tailor-made mechanisms to access funding/investment for social innovations at different stages

The financial needs of social innovations are diverse. These needs differ by the sector/field of activity of the social innovations but especially by the stage of the social innovation. In this regard financial needs for the problematisation and emergence stages are different from those needs for scaling. This action recommends the development of financial and non-financial support to enable social innovations to access funding and investment at different stages of their development cycles, i.e., ideation, emergence, consolidation, and scaling.

The implementation of this action would require a partnership between the public sector (namely government departments), social finance lenders, philanthropists, impact investors and intermediary third sector organisations (as coordinators); taking full potential of European funding to support the social innovation sector through different programmes (e.g., InvestEU, ESF+, ERDF, Horizon Europe, Next Generation EU) and adopting/adapting best practices and learnings from other Member States. Facilitating access for social innovation to public procurement opportunities is another important measure to assess and develop .

We recommend the development of this action in Year 2-4. The action is highly needed for the sector, however, due to its complexity it will require strong and long-standing agreements between the different stakeholders.

Action 8. Steer public and private funding to support social innovation through different mechanisms

Closely related to the previous action, this action refers to attracting public and private funding to support social innovation. This involves enhancing financial experimentation which focuses on blended (economic, social, environmental) outcomes and accepting a level of risk on social innovation funding/investment.

Mechanisms such as social impact bonds, social outcome contracts, public procurement on social and environmental indicators, and different types of resources from impact investment, strategic philanthropy, and sustainable finance, could be further explored.

The implementation of this action would require a partnership between the public sector (namely government departments), social finance lenders, philanthropists, impact investors and intermediary third sector organisations (as coordinators). We recommend the development of this action in Year 2 as according to stakeholders this is an area where Ireland is lagging behind. Initial measures can be initiated and evaluated for refinement during Years 3-4.

Action 9. Establish multi-annual and flexible funding (budgets)

Social innovations address complex social, environmental, and societal challenges, aiming to produce systemic change. Multi-annual and flexible funding (budgets) is vital to enhance the strategic planning of social innovation organisations/initiatives and therefore their ambition and capacity to bring about long-term systemic change. The development of multi-annual schemes that fund/co-finance social innovation initiatives for at least 3-5 years can have a ripple/exponential effect on the impact of these social innovations.

The implementation of this action could lie within central government departments. This action should be developed in parallel with the Strategy/Policy for Social Innovation (Action 6).

Table 3. Strategic Axis Funding & Investment. Actions

Action (Recommendation)	Who	Priority
Develop tailor-made mechanisms to access funding and investment for social innovations at different stages	Central Government Departments Social finance lenders Philanthropists Social Impact investors Intermediary third sector organisations (coordinators).	Years 2-4
Steer public and private funding to support social innovation through different mechanisms	Central Government Departments Social finance lenders Philanthropists Impact investors Intermediary third sector organisations (coordinators)	Years 2-4
Establish multi-annual and flexible funding (budgets)	Central Government Departments	Years 2-4

3.4 Social Impact Assessment

The fourth strategic axis refers to social impact assessment for social innovation in Ireland. Three specific actions are proposed for this aim:

Action 10. Gather data/evidence and enhance applied and collaborative research

A significant element for showing the impact of social innovations in Ireland is to gather data/evidence about the type, scale, and impact of social innovations but also about the available supports, strengths and needs of socially innovative agents. Besides

gathering evidence at national scale through statistics, enhancing applied and collaborative research between academics/researchers and social innovative organisations/initiatives to co-produce knowledge can establish relevant synergies that boost social innovation.

The implementation of this action can be coordinated by academic/research partners in collaboration with social innovation intermediaries and agents. This action needs to be coordinated with Action 3 ('specialised social innovation information platform and forum') in order to include data gathered into the open access repository so enhancing transparency and accessibility data. We recommend this action to be developed in Years 2-4.

Action 11. Develop a national methodological framework for social impact assessment

The assessment of the social impact of social innovation in Ireland requires a common methodological framework for comparability and standardisation, preferably aligned with international frameworks to facilitate comparison in a broader context. Due to the diverse, dynamic, and multi-stakeholder features of social innovation this framework would require acknowledging different components of a social innovation such as the outputs, outcomes as well as (even more importantly) the process leading to these. The recommendation is that the methodological framework allows for comparisons while including flexibility that acknowledges the dynamic nature of social innovations. Mixed (qualitative and quantitative), multi-dimensional (social, economic, environmental) and multi-scale (geographically sensitive) indicators are recommended.

Besides being key for comparing data and providing evidence for policymaking an important aim of this framework will be to encourage social innovative organisations/initiatives to measure/assess and monitor their social, economic, and environmental impact.

Following initiatives from other European countries, e.g., UK, Portugal, it would be useful to develop a website/portal that aggregates and organises information on public investment in several social issue areas that are a priority for Ireland (e.g., education, healthcare, employment), enhancing transparent access to data about public spending. The aim will be to 1) have a better understanding of the allocation of public investments/funding across social issues, 2) encourage the development of innovative intervention models that have the potential of being more efficient and effective when compared to existing interventions.

This action can be co-coordinated by the (multi-stakeholder) NCCSI and academic partners with specific expertise on the subject. We recommend this action to be developed in Year 1-2.

Action 12. Aligning social impact assessment with the Sustainable Development Goals

Complementary to the national scope of this Blueprint, the impact assessment of social innovation in Ireland should relate to international objectives and indicators. In this regard, it is recommended that impact assessment indicators developed under Action 11 reflect national policy objectives and priorities established by the EU and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The reference to the SDGs reinforces the multidimensional features of social innovation, the aim for systemic change and can act as standards for guidance in strategic decision making.

The implementation of this action can be coordinated by the NCCSI and government departments. We recommend this action to be developed in Year 1-2.

Table 4. Strategic Axis Social Impact Assessment. Actions.

| Action (Recommendation)	Who	Priority
Gather data/evidence and enhance applied and collaborative research	Academia/Research (coordination) Social innovation intermediaries and agents	Years 2-4
Develop a national methodological framework for social impact assessment	NCCSI Academia	Years 1-2
Aligning social impact assessment with SDGs	NCCSI Central Government Departments	Years 1-2

Interrelation between strategic axes and specific actions

Despite the presentation for clarity of strategic axes and specific actions in separate sections, these are interrelated. The feedback and synergies among these actions altogether contribute to a stronger social innovation ecosystem, see Figure 2 for a representation on these interrelations.

Figure 2. Interrelations between strategic axis and specific actions of the Blueprint for Social Innovation in Ireland

Action 1 Establish an inclusive working definition of SI for Ireland.
Action 2 Raise awareness to different audiences
Action 3 Specialised SI information platform and forum
Action 4 Develop a NCCSI
Action 5 Enhance Cross-Dep. Collaborations
Action 6 Strategy/Policy Social Innovation
Action 7 Develop tailor-made mechanisms to access funding and investment for SI at different stages
Action 8 Steer public and private funding to support social innovation through different mechanisms
Action 9 Establish multi-annual and flexible funding (budgets)
Action 10 Gather data/evidence and enhance applied and collaborative research
Action 11 Develop a national methodological framework for social impact assessment
Action 12 Aligning social impact assessment with SDGs
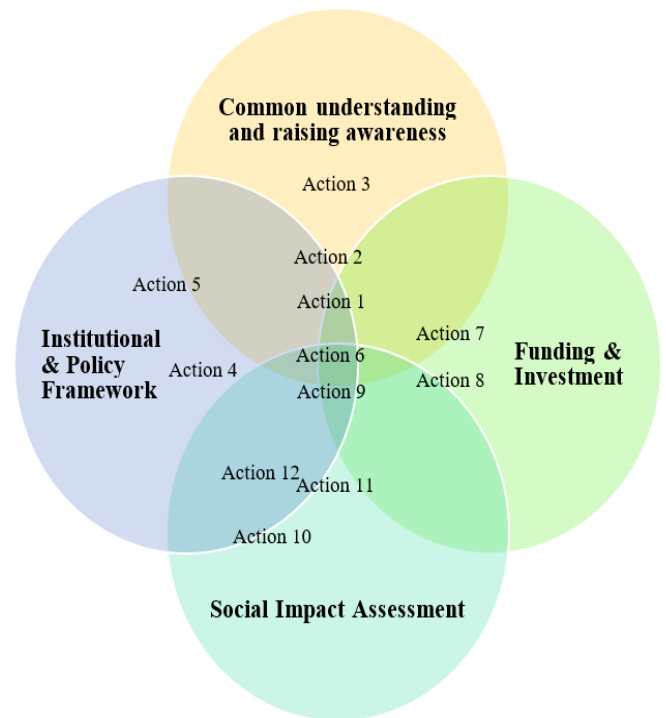
4. Conclusions

Social innovation represents a complementary form of other types of innovation such as technological or public innovation. However, social innovation presents specific features related to its collective and collaborative character, cross-sectoral nature, and its aim for systemic change.

The complexity and multidimensionality of challenges that Ireland is currently facing such as climate change, ageing population and unbalanced regional development, point towards the need for new ways of thinking and acting. In this context social innovation has been identified as a mechanism with potential to address complex challenges and develop new solutions which foster a more socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable development.

Research undertaken for this project shows that Ireland is not short of social innovations at grassroots level and some (piecemeal) support is available. However, there is a need to further develop conducive and strategic frameworks that facilitate social innovations to flourish, consolidate and ultimately to scale.

This Blueprint aims to reinforce social innovation making a real and lasting impact, by working to build capacities of key social innovation players across government, academia, industry, and civil society, to strengthen and enhance their capacity to act, and encourage cross-sectoral experimentalism and new and collaborative ways of working to address societal and environmental challenges.

This Blueprint establishes four strategic axes that stress the relevance of: 1) building a common understanding and raising awareness of social innovation; 2) developing institutional and policy frameworks; 3) funding and investment and 4) establishing social impact assessment indicators that can show the contribution of social innovations to Ireland. With the development of the actions proposed in this framework Ireland can be a leading country for social innovation within Europe with a coherent framework that recognises at institutional level, through a national policy/strategy, the importance of social innovation for society.

The National Competence Centre for Social Innovation will be a catalyst for social innovation, bringing innovation to social policy across government departments and regional and local government agencies.

The actions of the Blueprint also would enhance the capacity of Ireland to harness ESF+ (and other EU programmes) funding and boost the mobilisation of private and public funding for social innovative initiatives in a more structured/strategic manner.

Finally, the Blueprint proposes actions to create the framework conditions and an enabling environment where social innovations can emerge and scale at local, regional, and national level; providing support to consolidate and/or scale those who have been proved successful; and actions that support the flourish of new social innovations. All

these supports to social innovation present an important opportunity to contribute to a fair, inclusive and sustainable country.

Appendix 1. Consortium Advisory Committee

Organisation	Name
Ireland	
Assistant Secretary General, DRCD	Bairbre Nic Aongusa
Venture Capitalist & Angel Investor	Brian Caulfield
Portugal	
Dean Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics	Filipe Santos
Portuguese MEP	Maria Manuel Leitão Marques
Bulgaria	
European Commission DG Economic and Financial Affairs	Georgia Efremova
Single Step, Bulgaria	Ivan Dimov
Cyprus	
Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance	Christopher Markides
Associate Professor at University of Nicosia	Stefanos Spaneas

Appendix 2. Consortium Executive Committee

Organisation	Name
Ireland	
Rethink Ireland	Deirdre Mortell
Rethink Ireland	Mario Vottero
Genio	Madeleine Clarke
Genio	John Healy (Previously)
Portugal	
Cohesion and Development Agency (AD&C) I.P.	Patricia Borges
Portugal Social Innovation Mission Unit	Filipe Almeida
Bulgaria	
The Change Foundation	Dimitar Dimitrov
The Change Foundation	Yordanka Saparevska
BCause Foundation	Elitsa Barakova
BCause Foundation	Penka Tsvetkova
Cleantech Bulgaria	Mariyana Hamanova
Cleantech Bulgaria	Lyubomir Peynovski
Cleantech Bulgaria	Maria Nakova
Bulgarian Center For-Not-Profit Law	Nadya Shabani
Bulgarian Center For-Not-Profit Law	Elena Kalinova
The Business Institute	Svetlan Stanoev
The Business Institute	Tzvetelina Teneva
Cyprus	
SYNTHESIS Center for Research and Education Ltd	George Isaias
SYNTHESIS Center for Research and Education Ltd	Andri Kyriacou
Center for Social Innovation	Katerina Theodoridou

Center for Social Innovation	Demetris Hadjisofocl

Appendix 3. National Advisory Consultative Group for Social Innovation in Ireland

Sector	Name	Role
FUSE REPRESENTATIVES		
Rethink Ireland	Mario Vottero	Lead Partner FUSE, Chair
Genio	Gráinne Smith	FUSE Coordinator
ACADEMIA		
TCD Center for Social Innovation	Dr. Gemma Donnelly-Cox	Co-Director
Swarthmore College (USA)	Dr. Denise Crossan	Director of Community & Strategic Initiatives
TU Dublin	Clodagh O'Reilly	PhD Candidate
INDUSTRY/ PHILANTHROPY		
Community Foundation	Denise Charlton	CEO
Social Finance Foundation	Brendan Whelan	CEO
Innovate Northern Ireland	Clare McGee	Co-founder
Wake Up Capital	Faye Drouillard	Founder & General Partner
Scale Ireland	Martina Fitzgerald	CEO
Philanthropy Ireland	Eilis Murray	CEO
CIVIL SOCIETY		
Social Impact Ireland	Pauline Gannon	Co-founder & Director
SEI	Tim Griffiths	CEO
Innovate Communities	Fiona Descoteaux	CEO
Innovate Communities	Tom Doyle	Social Innovation Manager
Inishowen Development Partnership	Patricia Lee	Research Officer

Monaghan Integrated Development	Gabriel O'Connell	CEO
Northside Partnership	Paul Rogers	CEO
Northside Partnership	Niamh McTiernan	Director of Services
Ballyhoura Local Development Co.	Padraig Casey	CEO
Young Social Innovators	Rachel Collier	CEO
The Wheel	Ivan Cooper	Director of Public Policy
The Wheel	Hugh O'Reilly	Director of Development

Appendix 4. Steering Group for Social Innovation in Ireland

Department	Name	Role
DRCD	Ciara Bates	Principal Officer
DRCD	Laure Garcia	
DRCD	Richard Gavin Andrew Forde (Previously)	Assistant Principal Officer Principal Officer
DFHERIS	Dervila Twamley	Head of ESF/EGF Policy and Operations
DFHERIS	Luke Devoy (Previously)	
Rethink Ireland	Deirdre Mortell	CEO
Rethink Ireland	Mario Vottero	Impact Director
Genio	Madeleine Clarke	CEO, Chair
Genio	Gráinne Smith	FUSE Coordinator