

Enabling Social Innovation in Belgium

Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ¹¹

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Belgium's social innovation ecosystem.

- ✓ Direct focus on social innovation ⌘ Connected but indirect focus on social innovation ✗ No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Official Definition of Social Innovation ⌘



There is **no legal definition** of social innovation in Belgium. Flanders uses “**structural innovation targeting societal needs**” (2012)¹, while Wallonia defines it as “**novel responses to unmet social needs**” (2013)²

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



There is no dedicated government ministry for social innovation. Coordination occurs regionally and through the **National Competence Center for Social Innovation (NCCSI, 2024–)**, led by Social Innovation Factory under ESF+⁶.

- **Flanders:** Dept. of Work and Social Economy
- **Wallonia:** Social Economy Directorate (2008)
- **Brussels:** Innoviris and Ministry of Economy
- **German-speaking Community:** Employment and Social Affairs unit

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



There is no national strategy, but it is embedded in regional policy:

- **Wallonia:** Alternativ'ES (2020–2024)² Wallonia is currently developing a new regional strategy (2025-2026) with a “2030 Vision” supported by a Technical Support Instrument (TSI) of the European Commission in cooperation with the OECD.
- **Flanders:** Social Economy Orientation Note (2019–2024)⁴
- **Brussels:** Shifting Economy Plan (2019–2024)⁵

Policies, Laws & Regulations ✓ ⌘



A combination of regional laws and broader instruments support social innovation:

- **Legal frameworks:** Brussels Ordinance (2018)⁵, Wallonia Decree (2008)², Flemish Decree (2012)⁴, Federal Company Code reform (2019)⁷
- **Broader enablers:** 2016 procurement law and tax reliefs for social-purpose entities¹



Official Statistics

There are **no dedicated statistics** on social innovation. In 2020, the social economy included:

- **17,066 entities, 583,209 jobs** (12% workforce)⁸



Government Programs

Belgium's main public programs include:

- **Flanders:** Social Innovation Factory⁶
- **Wallonia:** Projets Pilotes, iES! Incubator², W.ALTER
- **Brussels:** Innoviris Social Innovation Calls⁵
- **National:** ESF+ Competence Centre (2024–)⁶

ECOSYSTEM



Stakeholders

Belgium's ecosystem is **mature and decentralised**, coordinated nationally by the Social Innovation Factory⁶.

- Key actors: **ConcertES, Febecoop, Ashoka Belgium^{2 6}**
- Networks: **The Shift, Poseco, Coopkracht**



Support Initiatives

Support is provided through:

- **Incubators:** CoopCity, iES!, Oksigen Lab, IPropeller
- **Academic partners:** French-speaking Universities (ULB, Umons, Uliège and UCLouvain), KU Leuven²
- **Platforms:** BeCentral, BlueHealth Innovation



Collaboration

Cross-sector collaboration is promoted through:

- **Events:** Belgian Impact Day, Radicale Vernieuwers, Inspir'ES, Coopday
- **Funders:** King Baudouin Foundation¹
- **EU networks:** NCCSI as part of ENCCSI⁶

FINANCE



Financing Schemes

Belgium combines public and private tools:

- **Public funding:** ESF+, regional calls, project grants^{2 4 5}
- **Public investment:** Trividend, W.Alter, Finance&Invest Brussels
- **Ethical lenders:** Hefboom, Socrowd²
- **Private investors:** SI² Fund, Kois, BNP Paribas Fortis⁶, CREDAL, Fincommon
- **Philanthropy:** King Baudouin Foundation, corporate foundations¹



Inclusiveness of Financing

Financing targets **women, migrants, and the long-term unemployed.**

- Inclusive tools: **Social Impact Bonds** (e.g. Duo for a Job), microStart loans^{1 5}

SOCIETY



Public Awareness of Social Innovation

Public recognition is low and often framed through the “social economy”. Visibility is increasing via awards and campaigns (e.g. Radicale Vernieuwers)¹



Research

Belgium has a strong academic base:

- Key centres: **ULiège, KU Leuven, UCL, UMons, ULB**
- Practitioner research: **ConcertES through the Social Economy Observatory, Steunpunt WSE**
- Social economy = **12% of national employment**²



Education & Human Capital

Capacity-building is supported by:

- **Formal education:** HEC Liège Master’s, Inter-university Master in Social Economy³, Social economy advisory agencies (ACES) and the iES! Incubator.
- **Informal training:** CoopCity, Social Innovation Factory



Entrepreneurship

Belgium ranks highly for business and innovation:

- **GII 2024:** Rank 24 (score 47.7)⁵
- No GEM data; social economy = 12% of jobs



Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity
strong welfare support (WVS)⁶



Participation
moderately strong democratic environment (EIU 7.64)⁷



Volunteerism
CAF data indicate mid-level performance on giving and volunteering⁸



Sustainability
EPI rank 14 (score 66.7)⁹, CCPI rank 37 (low performer)¹⁰