

Enabling Social Innovation in Portugal



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Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ¹

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Portugal'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 single**, universally adopted, formal *legal definition* in Portugal, but highly operational and institutionally embedded **working definitions** are in place, particularly through the Portugal Social Innovation (PSI) government initiative). In that context, Social Innovation as been understood as the result of the development and implementation of new products, services, practices and methodologies with a positive social impact, which promote autonomy and participation, fight inequalities and strengthen social relationships, creating new collaborations that benefit society and improve its capacity to act. ^{2 5 13}

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓

- **Portugal Social Innovation (PSI):** Government Public Initiative, created under the Presidency of the Council of Ministers to support social innovation and social entrepreneurship, mobilizing European funds to finance social innovation projects and to develop the social investment market. Created in 2014 ³, with its mandate renewed in 2023 ⁶, PSI is also the lead of the National Competence Centre for Social Innovation.

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓

- **2030 Agenda for Impact:** Portugal's dedicated national strategy for social innovation and investment, aiming to foster innovative responses to social challenges, mobilize public and private investment, and strengthen the ecosystem through governance, funding, and capacity building. ⁶

Policies, Laws & Regulations ✓ ✎

Frameworks directly focused on social innovation:

- **Resolution No. 73-A/2014:** Created PSI and established social innovation/social entrepreneurship as an ESF intervention area. ³
- **Decree-Law No. 28/2018:** Established the Social Innovation Fund (FIS), as part of PSI, for loans and co-investment in social innovation ventures. ⁴
- **Resolution No. 54/2023:** Extended the mandate of PSI, strengthened impact investment infrastructure, and aligned social innovation with SDGs. ⁶
- **Social Impact Bonds Framework:** Portugal's regulatory and operational model enabling outcome-based contracts under PSI. ⁵

Key examples of broader frameworks that more indirectly support social innovation:

- **Social Economy Framework Law – Law 30/2013:** Provides the legal basis for social economy entities, mentions social innovation as a priority, and mandates the Social Economy Satellite Account.
- **Tax Benefits Statute:** Under the Social Impact Bonds program there is a tax relief of 30% for investment in social innovation.

Official Statistics

- **Social Economy Satellite Account (CSES):** Instituto Nacional de Estatística and Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social (CASES) measure the economic weight of the social economy (latest 2019-2020), including organisations implementing social innovations (approx. 3% of GVA). ⁷
- **Portugal Social Innovation project statistics:** Public reporting shows 698 projects supported, €101m of European funding approved, alongside €51m social investment mobilised within Portugal 2020 (2014-2020) Partnership Agreement. In the current Portugal 2030 Partnership Agreement (2021-2027), PSI is supporting 483 projects, €88m of European funding approved, and €23m of social investment. ^{2 13}

Government Programs

- **Portugal Social Innovation:**
 - Programs in 2014-2023 focused on organisational and impact measurement capacity-building, partnerships for co-investment to scale early-stage innovations, social impact bonds for innovations on key policy areas, and FIS instruments.
 - Programs in 2023-2027 focus on scale-up and impact investment infrastructure.
- **CASES:** Programs supporting cooperatives and volunteering (i.e. CoopJovem, FORMAES), while social economy-focused, also promoted social innovation.

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

Prominent non-governmental actors directly supporting social innovation include:

- **Rede de Incubadoras de Inovação Social (RIIS):** National network of social innovation incubators. ¹⁰
- **Incubadora Regional de Inovação Social (IRIS):** Regional social innovation incubator. ¹³
- **Casa do Impacto (Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa):** Impact hub and incubator/accelerator focused on social innovation and impact entrepreneurship.
- **MAZE Impact:** Impact investment intermediary designing social impact bonds, managing impact funds, and running acceleration programs for impact-driven ventures. ¹⁰
- **Impact Hub Lisbon:** Incubation space for mission-driven startups, connecting Portuguese innovators with an international social innovation network. ¹³
- **Ashoka Portugal:** Supports high-impact social innovators as Ashoka Fellows.

Social economy sectoral networks that indirectly support social innovation include:

- **CASES:** Coordination body for social economy organisations (cooperatives, mutuels, foundations, IPSS and associations).

Portugal
**INOVAÇÃO
SOCIAL**



- **CONFECOOP – Confederação Cooperativa Portuguesa:** National confederation for the non-agricultural cooperative sector.
- **RedPES** (Rede Portuguesa de Economia Solidária), **RESIT** (Rede de Empresas Sociais de Inserção pelo Trabalho), **CNIS** (Confederação Nacional das Instituições de Solidariedade, **UMP** (União das Misericórdias Portuguesas): networks for cooperatives, insertion enterprises and solidarity institutions.
- **Plataforma Portuguesa das ONGD:** National platform for development NGOs.
- **Incubators of Social Innovation**
 - IT Hub - Centro de Empreendedorismo de Impacto do Douro, Tâmega e Sousa
 - +Economia
 - Ave Social Hub - Centro para o Empreendedorismo de Impacto do Ave
 - NORDESTE_IN - empoderar a comunidade para a inovação social
 - Human Power Hub – Centro de Inovação Social de Braga
 - Vieira Viva - Centro de Resiliência e Inclusão para a Ação
 - Porto de Impacto
 - Basto Empreendedor Social
 - ACTIVE – Centros de Empreendedorismo de Impacto no Alto Tâmega e Barroso
 - DOURIIS
 - Social Start In
 - Centro de Impacto Rural
 - Incubadora de Inovação Social de Viseu Dão Lafões
 - Social IN | Incubadora Social de Castelo Branco
 - RIBA – Uma Start-up social ancorada no Tejo (Centro)
 - “I3S BSE- INCUBADORA ITINERANTE PARA O EMPREENDEDORISMO DE IMPACTO”
 - Oeste Respira - Ecosistema para o Impacto
 - Prontos + shift = Impact Village
 - PINHAL imPACT - INCUBADORA ITINERANTE DE EMPREENDEDORISMO DE IMPACTO DO PINHAL INTERIOR
 - i9social - Centro de Inovação Social
 - CEIS-FCA - Centro de Empreendedorismo de Impacto Social da Fundação Cardoso do Amaral
 - INterioriza-te! Youth - Social Innovation Hub
 - Academia Spin-off Social
 - Fator C'Idade: Empreendedorismo Sénior e de Impacto em Coimbra
 - AVEIRO IMPACT HUB - CENTRO PARA O EMPREENDEDORISMO DE IMPACTO DA REGIÃO DE AVEIRO
 - Incubadora Social de Investigação e Inovação
 - RIBA – Uma Start-up social ancorada no Tejo (Alentejo)
 - Incubadora de Inovação Social do Baixo Alentejo - Centro para Empreendedorismo de Impacto
 - Centro de Inovação Social do Alto Alentejo
 - Centro de Empreendedorismo de Impacto da Lezíria do Tejo
 - MAIS Impacto Social
 - Mind Empreende
 - Jobs Airport - Centro para o Empreendedorismo de Impacto
 - INOVA COMUNIDADE DE IMPACTO SOCIAL
 - CONNECT – Transformar conhecimento em impacto
 - Lx Circular
 - Ponte Hub: shift happens
 - Farol - um guia para o empreendedorismo e impacto social
 - Algarve Up! Social
 - Centro para o Empreendedorismo de Impacto do Barlavento Algarvio
 - Moinho | Centro para o Empreendedorismo de Impacto do Sotavento Algarvio

Support Initiatives

Key examples of non-financial support initiatives for social innovation include:



- **Casa do Impacto programs:** Incubation and acceleration support to facilitate co-creation among universities and social organisations.
- **Impact Hub Lisbon programs:** Acceleration and corporate innovation programs focused on circular economy, sustainability and social impact.
- **Atlantic Social Lab / ISII (University of Coimbra & CES):** EU-funded initiatives involving Portuguese municipalities, piloting territorial social innovation labs and a centre for impact entrepreneurship.

Collaboration

Key examples of partnerships within the social innovation ecosystem include:



- **Social Impact Bonds:** Collaborations between ministries, municipalities, MAZE, foundations and investors to pilot and scale innovations.
- **PSI ecosystem coordination:** Public agencies, social economy organisations, investors and intermediaries collaborate on scaling innovative approaches.

Events & Awards

- **Impacto Social Summit (Porto):** National gathering of social innovators, funders and public authorities.
- **Lisbon Social Innovation Awards ("Innovation for All"):** Municipal challenges supporting urban social innovation solutions.
- **Santander Social Innovation Award:** Corporate award promoting high-potential social innovation projects.
- **Gulbenkian Prize for Humanity:** Annual award from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation recognising environmental innovations that benefit people and planet.
- **Social Innovation Village (Aldeia da Inovação Social):** One of the earliest and most emblematic PSI initiatives, originally launched in Cerdeira, transforming a village into a hub for innovators, social projects, workshops, debates and pitch sessions focused on social challenges. ¹³
- **BPI & Fundação "la Caixa" Awards:** Portugal's largest corporate-philanthropic awards scheme, funding social inclusion, childhood poverty, ageing and disability initiatives nationwide.
- **Caixa Social Awards:** A national awards programme funding high-impact third-sector projects in inclusion, training and healthcare.
- **Fidelidade Comunidade Award:** A corporate social impact award supporting community-based projects addressing social vulnerability and inclusion.
- **Lidl "Mais Ajuda" Award:** A national corporate award funding local organisations working on food security and basic social needs.
- **António Sérgio Award (Social Innovation Category):** A public national award recognising innovative and transformative social economy initiatives.
- **Ímpares Programme (Fundação AGEAS & CUF):** A joint corporate-foundation capacity building programme for social entrepreneurs and acceleration of social innovation.



FINANCE

Financing Schemes

Key examples of financing schemes for social innovation include:



- **Public/ESF(+) instruments:** PSI mobilised approximately €100 M in 2023-2027 and €101 M in 2014-2020 of European funds for social innovation, in the form of capacity-building grants, partnerships with co-investment, social impact bonds, and Social Innovation Fund loans/co-investment. ²
- **Impact investment funds:** Mustard Seed MAZE Fund I invests approximately €40M in impact ventures. ¹⁰
- **Foundations & corporate investment:** Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Santander Foundation, and others provide grants, challenge prizes and impact investment.
- **International/EU projects:** Interreg and Horizon projects fund social innovation pilots and territorial labs.



Financing Inclusivity

- PSI funding prioritises **vulnerable groups** (unemployed, NEETs, migrants, people with disabilities, disadvantaged territories).

SOCIETY



Public Awareness of Social Innovation

- Media and public discourse increasingly reference social innovation, particularly in relation to impact entrepreneurship, climate action, territorial cohesion and youth.



Research

- **Centre for Social Studies (CES), University of Coimbra:** Leading hub with projects on social innovation, social enterprises and solidarity economy. [11](#) [14](#) [15](#)
- **IES – Social Business School:** Applied research hub dedicated to social innovation and social entrepreneurship. [10](#) [11](#)
- **Yunus Social Innovation Center (Católica-Lisbon):** Academic/practitioner hub on social entrepreneurship and impact.
- Other active research groups at **Nova SBE** and **ISCTE** contribute studies on social entrepreneurship and impact measurement. [14](#) [15](#)
- **Practitioner research** includes PSI evaluations and the Portuguese Social Enterprise Monitor, informing both government and funders.
- Portuguese **scholars** such as Hugo Pinto, Maria de Fátima Ferreiro, Jorge Cunha and others have contributed to international literature on social innovation, particularly in relation to the public sector and regional development.



Education & Human Capital

- **Formal programs** directly focused on social innovation include Master's degrees in: Impact Entrepreneurship & Innovation (Nova SBE), Entrepreneurship & Social Innovation (Beira Interior), Social Work – Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship (Católica), Social Intervention, Innovation & Social Entrepreneurship (Coimbra).
- Social innovation topics are also integrated into broader management, sustainability and public policy **curricula** across universities, including teacher training at the Social and Educational Innovation Group (CIIMAR) and vocational training at INNOVEDU – the Institute of Education and Social Innovation.
- **Informal programs** directly focused on social innovation include impact Bootcamps (IES – Social Business School) for social innovators, Programa de Incubação e Aceleração (Human Power Hub/BragaHabit) - an incubation/acceleration program for early-stage social innovations, and the Social Innovation Academy learning community. The social innovation incubators, support by PSI, are building capacity in Social Innovation.



Entrepreneurship

35th / 82 countries 

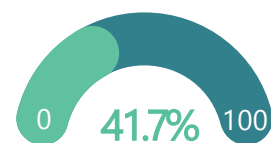
Enabling conditions for business

EIU Business Environment Ranking 2024

31st / 133 countries 

Enabling environment for innovation

Global Innovation Index 2024



Prevalence of (social) entrepreneurship

Slightly above average rates of early stage entrepreneurship and moderate prevalence of social entrepreneurship, with 41.7% of new entrepreneurs reporting a motivation to make a difference **in the world**
Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2019

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity:

Moderate generalised trust in Portuguese society; strong support for helping vulnerable groups (World Values Survey)

EIU Business Environment Ranking 2024



Level of political participation by citizens

EIU Democracy Index 2024

119th / 142 countries



Culture of volunteerism

Portugal ranked 119th among 142 countries in the 2024 CAF World Giving Index, with approximately 13% of the population volunteering monthly

CAF World Giving Index 2024

26th / 180 countries



Commitment to sustainability

Portugal ranked 26th overall among 180 countries in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index, and 22nd on climate change performance.

Environmental Performance Index 2024

