

Enabling Social Innovation in Spain

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 Spain'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 ⌘

Spain has **no official legal definition** of social innovation. The term is used descriptively in policy and academic contexts, broadly aligned with EU usage, but is **not codified in national law** ^{2,3}.

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓

Spain has no dedicated national government body for social innovation. Responsibilities are dispersed:

- **Ministry of Labour and Social Economy** oversees social economy policies, under which many social innovations fall ⁴.
- The Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and Agenda 2030 is leading the development of a **National Competence Centre for Social Innovation (NCCSI)** and oversees the **VIDAS** Social Innovation Platform. In parallel, **Competence Centres for Social Innovation (CERIS CcSI)** support knowledge exchange and capacity-building.
- **Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030** promotes innovation in social services and proposed a national reference centre for social innovation in social services in 2023 ⁵. Overall governance is **fragmented and decentralised**.
- Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓

- There is no standalone national social innovation strategy. Social innovation is addressed indirectly through:
- **Spanish Social Economy Strategy 2023–2027**, which promotes innovation by social economy actors in care, digital inclusion and the green transition ⁴.
- Broader innovation and entrepreneurship strategies that reference social impact but do not prioritise social innovation as a distinct policy field ³.

Policies, Laws & Regulations

Key enabling frameworks include:

- **Law 5/2011 on the Social Economy** – Recognises social economy entities and provides an institutional basis for many social innovations ⁴.
 - **Law 44/2007 on Work Integration Enterprises** – Supports innovative labour-market inclusion models for vulnerable groups.
 - **Public Procurement Law (2017)** – Allows social clauses and reserved contracts.
 - **Startup Law 28/2022** – Introduces incentives for impact-oriented startups.
- Spain's legal framework supports social innovation indirectly, mainly via the social economy.

Official Statistics

Spain does not collect official statistics on social innovation. However, official statistics exist for social economy entities (e.g., cooperatives, foundations, insertion companies, special employment centres) via the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy / CIRIECSTAT.

- The social economy represents approximately 10% of GDP and 12.5% of employment, serving as a proxy for social innovation activity ⁴.
- International assessments have noted weak data availability and low visibility of social innovation ².

Government Programs

Key programs supporting social innovation include:

- **POISES (2014–2020)** ESF-funded programme supporting 2,258 entities and benefiting around 68,585 individuals. ⁴.
- **Next Generation EU / Recovery Plan** – Funds innovative approaches in social services, care and digital inclusion.
- **Regional programs** – Social innovation labs and pilots at autonomous community level. Public support is **largely EU-driven**, with limited national-level coordination.
- **Ecosystem / Support Organisations – Inclusion Policy Lab:** The Inclusion Policy Lab (Laboratory of Inclusion Policies) has rolled out 34 pilot projects delivering inclusion pathways, designed and evaluated through rigorous methodologies to identify what works best to tackle poverty and social exclusion; these pilots combine income support with tailored accompaniment and services (education, employment, digital skills, social support, health) and are linked to the Minimum Living Income (IMV), conceived not only as a cash benefit but also as a lever for evidence-based inclusion interventions and continuous policy improvement.
(<https://www.inclusion.gob.es/web/policy-lab>)

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

Spain's ecosystem is civil-society-led ². Key actors include:

- **CEPES** – National confederation of social economy enterprises.
- **Ashoka Spain** – Supports leading social entrepreneurs and systems-change initiatives.
- **Major foundations** – Fundación "la Caixa", Fundación ONCE, Fundación Telefónica.
- **Academic centres** – ESADE Institute for Social Innovation; IE University Center for Social Innovation.
- **Impact hubs and co-working spaces** – Impact Hub network and local innovation spaces.

Sectoral Networks



Well-established networks support diffusion of social innovation within sectors:

- Cooperatives (e.g. regional federations).
- Work integration enterprises (FAEDEI).
- NGOs and development organisations (Platform of Social Action NGOs).

Support Organisations



Key non-financial support providers include:

- **Incubators/accelerators** – Ship2B, Social Nest, BBVA Momentum.
- **Impact intermediaries** – CREAS, Open Value Foundation, Spain NAB.
- **Local innovation labs** – Municipal and regional social innovation labs.

Support Initiatives



Common support instruments include:

- Foundation-led innovation programs and awards (e.g. Fundación “la Caixa”, Fundación MAPFRE) ⁶.
- Public–private innovation challenges and hackathons.
- EU-funded capacity-building initiatives (e.g. BuiCaSuS) ⁵.

Collaboration



Collaboration is **project-based rather than systemic**:

- Limited **Social Impact Bond** pilots at regional level.
- Local public–civil society partnerships in housing, care and inclusion.
- Weak national coordination across sectors ³.

Events & Awards



- **NESI Forum** – International social innovation conference (Málaga).
- National and regional social economy congresses.
- Social innovation awards by foundations and corporates.

FINANCE

Financing Schemes



Financing sources include:

- **Social Impact Fund (FIS):**, The Social Impact Fund (FIS) stands out as a public financial instrument designed to support impact investing and strengthen the social entrepreneurship ecosystem, managed by COFIDES, with an endowment of €400 million. Moreover, since 2024 the FIS framework includes a legal definition of impact investments (Article 11.1, second paragraph of Royal Decree-Law 4/2024), understood as investments that intentionally pursue a social and/or environmental impact, measurable and assessable through quantitative and/or qualitative indicators, which may be made across all asset classes, with a financial return at least equal to the principal invested; unlike other investments, they consider not only risk and financial return but also their effects.
(<https://www.cofides.es/financiacion/instrumentos-financieros/fondo-impacto-social-fis>)
- **EU funds (ESF+, NextGen EU)** – Main source of public funding for social innovation ⁴.
- **Public grants** – Embedded within social inclusion and innovation programs.
- **Impact investment** – Growing but still limited; approx. €310m estimated by late 2010s ².
- **Philanthropy & CSR** – Major role of large foundations and corporate programs.
- **Crowdfunding** – Rapid growth via platforms such as Goteo ²



Inclusiveness of Financing

Public funding prioritises **women, youth, people with disabilities, long-term unemployed and Roma communities** ⁴.

However:

- Early-stage and rural innovators face access barriers.
- Impact investment remains urban- and scale-focused.
- Overall inclusiveness is **partial**.

SOCIETY



Public Awareness of Social Innovation

Public awareness remains low to moderate.

- The concept is rarely used in mainstream discourse.
- Spain ranked 28th of 45 countries in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Social Innovation Index, citing low visibility ².



Research

Research exists but is **fragmented**:

- University-based centres (ESADE, IE, public universities).
- Participation in EU research projects on social innovation.
- Limited systematic evaluation of social innovation outcomes ^{2,3}.



Education & Human Capital

- Growing number of **university-level programs** in social entrepreneurship and social innovation.
- Limited integration into primary and secondary education.
- Capacity-building largely driven by foundations and accelerators.



Entrepreneurship

30th / 82 countries 

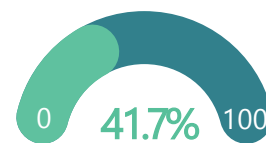
Ease of doing business ¹

EIU Business Environment Ranking 2024

29th / 133 countries 

Indicating solid innovation capacity

Global Innovation Index 2024



Social entrepreneurship prevalence is moderate and under-recognised

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2019 ²



Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity:

Strong traditions of solidarity and civic mobilisation

EIU Business Environment Ranking 2024



Level of political participation

86th / 142 countries 

volunteerism

formal volunteering and giving are low

CAF World Giving Index 2023 ³

22ⁿ / 180 countries 

Sustainability

Spain performs strongly on environmental performance

Environmental Performance Index 2024 ¹⁰