

Enabling Social Innovation in Austria

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 Austria'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 🔗



Austria has no standalone national law defining social innovation. However, a legally recognised definition is used in the ESF+ Regulation, which applies in Austria and defines social innovation as activities that are *social in their objectives and their means*, involving the development of new ideas addressing social needs and fostering new social relations. ²

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



There is no dedicated national body. Relevant functions are split across:

- **Austrian Research Promotion Agency (FFG)** – funds social and non-technological innovation. ³
- **Federal ministries** (labour/economy; social affairs) – support inclusion, labour-market and social-service innovation. ⁴
- **SI Plus Competence Centre (ESF+)** – coordinates national mapping and capacity-building. ⁵

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



Austria has no national strategy. Social innovation appears within:

- **Open Innovation Strategy (2016)** – emphasises participation, co-creation and societal challenges. ⁶
- **RTI Strategy** – highlights mission-oriented innovation for ecological and social transitions. ⁴

Policies, Laws & Regulations ✓ 🔗



- Directly supportive: **Open Innovation Strategy (2016)** – promotes societal innovation and citizen involvement. ⁴; **FFG "Impact Innovation"** – funds problem-driven, user-centred innovation, including social innovation. ³
- Indirectly enabling: Non-profit tax benefits, cooperative law, and climate legislation, which support social-economy organisations and innovation in energy, mobility and community services. ^{2 5}

Official Statistics 🔗



No official statistics exist specifically on social innovation. Social-economy data show approximately 6% of Austrian employment in social-economy organisations (latest national and EU-aligned estimates). ⁶ **The Austrian Social Enterprise Monitor (ASEM)** provides recurring survey data on social enterprises. ⁷

Government Programs



Austria has no single national programme for social innovation. Key instruments include:

- **FFG Impact Innovation** – small grants for non-technological/social innovation.³
- **ESF+ SI Plus** – ecosystem development and capacity-building.⁵
- **Regional pilots** (e.g. Vienna) focusing on social-service and inclusion innovation.⁴

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders



Key actors include:

- **Impact Hub Vienna** – major incubator/accelerator for social/environmental ventures.⁸
- **SENA** – national network for social entrepreneurs.²
- **ZSI** – Centre for Social Innovation – leading institute in EU projects.⁵
- **WU Vienna** – Social Entrepreneurship Center – research and ASEM coordination.⁷
- **Regional Social Business Hubs** (Styria, Upper Austria).⁴

Support Initiatives



Common forms: incubation (Impact Hub, regional hubs), research and knowledge platforms (WU Vienna, ZSI), and ecosystem coordination via SENA, ASEM and SI Plus.¹³

Collaboration, Events & Awards



Austria does **not have a single national government social-innovation award**, but it hosts major innovation awards such as **SozialMarie**, and participates in European recognition schemes. **The Verified Social Enterprise (VSE) Label** (2022+) certifies social enterprises rather than acting as an award. Impact ventures appear frequently in start-up competitions.^{8 9}

FINANCE

Financing Schemes



No consolidated national estimate exists. Main instruments:

- **FFG Impact Innovation** (up to ~EUR 75k).³
- **ESF+/EU** funding for inclusion, employment and capacity-building.⁵
- **Foundations and CSR funding** for social/environmental initiatives.⁴
- Limited but emerging impact investment linked to green transition.⁴

Inclusiveness of Financing



- ASEM finds many social enterprises work with migrants, people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups, but also shows **systemic financing barriers**, especially for early-stage ventures.⁷

SOCIETY

Public Awareness



Awareness of social innovation is growing but still limited; media visibility increases around sustainability, social entrepreneurship and hubs such as Impact Hub Vienna.^{7 8}

Research

Austria has a small but active research community:

- **ZSI** (EU social innovation research).⁵
- **WU Vienna** (social enterprise and impact research; ASEM).⁷

Education

Social innovation content appears in university programmes (social entrepreneurship, sustainability, non-profit management) and professional training (Ashoka Visionary Program, accelerators).^{7,8}

Entrepreneurship

18th
/ **80** countries

Business Environment

Ranks around 18th in the EIU Business Environment Index.^{10,11}

--th
/ **133** countries

Innovation Capacity

Austria is rated a **Strong Innovator** in the European Innovation Scoreboard



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

ASEM shows high social-impact motivation among early-stage entrepreneurs.⁷

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity

Austria shows moderate interpersonal trust



Political participation

high democratic participation



Volunteering

middle-rank volunteerism

8th
/ **180** countries

Sustainability

strong environmental performance.^{12,2}

Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2024